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MRS. GERALD'S NIECE

A NOVEL

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON

NEW EDITION

LONDON
BURNS AND OATES
GRANVILLE MANSIONS W
1886

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kitchen-garden and an old archway overgrown with ivy and bearing the fragments of a Latin inscription, were likewise supposed to be remnants of the ancient enclosure. The present house dated from the reign of James I. Successive additions had been made to it which were not all improvements; but whatever faults it possessed in an architectural point of view were disguised by the abundance of creepers which covered its walls. On the southern side especially, pink, white, yellow, and red roses, pomegranates, and myrtles, passionflowers and jessamine climbed up to the second story, invading and wreathing with their blossoms the framework of the windows, peeping into the sunny rooms and mingling their delicate shoots with the stout branches of the westeria, which in spring clothed the whole of the front and western side of the house with its luxuriant lilac clusters. The garden, too, was one bright mass of colours, not a mere flowery patchwork of various hues, laid out in a systematic manner, but a charming combination of flowers, such as Perdita might have woven, or Ariel couched in—

"Merrily, merrily,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

This blooming maze occupied the whole space between one side of the house, and a low moss-grown wall which separated it from the churchyard—one of those old fashioned burial places full of tall trees and waving grass, and daisies innumerable growing on the nameless graves of obscure villagers, and white roses and clematis adorning the tombstones of the more honoured, if not more honourable, occupants of the consecrated ground. On the opposite side a smooth green lawn extended to the edge of a grove of ash-trees, and a hill, covered partly with wood and partly with gorse, rose behind the house. Before it flowed a

rapid and transparent stream, in which many a speckled trout and careless minnow courted its doom. The constant sound of rippling water was one of the charms of the place. It was like its own peculiar music in the ears of those who loved it. Little diminutive brooks wended their way through the park, the shrubbery, and the grove, singing their songs of joy under the bushes, across the lawn, amongst the flowers. Though sheltered by its woods and secluded in its own grounds, Holmwood had also glimpses of distant country. Through the branches of the grove, where it was thinned, and straight away in front of the house, was to be seen, in the midst of a wide extent of pasture-land and cornfields, the spire of Ashdown Church, and farther on a broad river bearing on its bosom black barges which looked in the distance like flies on a mirror. A ridge of blue looking hills, over which a heavy mass of clouds generally rested, was discernible towards the west; and by certain lights, especially when the sky was stormy, the sea could be perceived lining the horizon with a silvery thread or a dark-blue ribbon.

The whole of this fair scene was gilded by the rays of the setting sun, when the three girls reached the steps in front of the house, and turned back to give a last look to the illuminated landscape, and the sky tinged by fiery and rosy-coloured clouds. What need is there to dwell on what every one has felt, the delight of the first evening in the country after months spent in a town? Who does not know that delightful sensation? Even those whose lot is by their own choice cast in that great huge London, so forcibly described by a modern writer as "That monster which looks so unmanageable and is so awfully wicked, so hopelessly magnificent, so heretically wise and proud after its own fashion, and yet after a fashion so good also! Such a multitudinous remnant in it who have never bowed the

knee to Baal. Such numbers seeking their way to the light; so much secret holiness, such supernatural lives, such loyalty, mercy, sacrifice, sweetness, and greatness." Yes, even they who love it with all its miseries, and who would not willingly live many days out of the year far from the great City, the mighty pulse of which seems to throb in their own hearts, they know the joy of leaving it behind for a time. More than others, perhaps, they appreciate the luxury of the silence which seems only the more deep for the low twitter of the birds amongst the leaves, or the drowsy hum of the bees over the flower-beds. With more or less of gladness or of melancholy, of hope or of *souvenance*, that beautiful old French word, according as life, and age, anI God have dealt with their souls, they gaze on the shadows lengthening on the dewy grass, and listen to the night wind whispering among the branches. It would be difficult to say which is sweetest at that hour—the young man's vision or the old man's dream.

We who are old remember the gradual manner in which the sense of this agreeable change used to steal upon us in days of yore, as we passed from the streets into the suburb, where the houses, standing wider and wider apart, admitted glimpses of green fields and hedges, till at last the high road was reached, and the fragrance of the air gave token that we were really getting into the country. How welcome was the sight of the little roadside inn, where we stopped to change horses—the picturesque gable-ended cottage-like hostelry, with its tiny garden and large spreading tree. And then after perhaps three or four days' journey, came the longed-for arrival, the glad revisiting of favourite haunts, the sunset hour, the quiet stroll, the falling asleep that first night lulled by the profound stillness, one of Nature's greatest charms; and yet Charles Lamb, the London poet, fled from Wordsworth's house,

in Westmoreland, scared by the silence of those mountainous regions. He could not rest far from the murmurs of the great City.

Now that a few hours will take us to the furthest part of England, the transition is more striking still. The noise of the streets has scarcely died away in our ears, when we find ourselves in the midst of pure air, rural scenery, and sylvan shades. A newspaper or a doze have filled up the time, and we seem scarcely to have left behind the bustle of the London station before we are landed in the depths of country retirement. But the exquisite pleasure of the contrast is seldom purchased nowadays by an uninterrupted residence of many months in town. Eliza and Jane Conway, however, had bought their enjoyment at that price, and thoroughly appreciated the change.

"It seems so strange, Annie," Jane exclaimed, "that this wonderfully beautiful place should be your own—your very own, as children say."

"And those woods and fields, and that pretty little village, does it also belong to you?" Eliza Conway asked.

"Almost all you see from here is my property," Annie replied; "one or two of the cottages in Holme are Mr. Hendon's; he is our nearest neighbour."

"What an immense responsibility it is for a young girl like you to possess such a property."

"But I do not, of course, manage it myself; Aunt Gerald does all the business with the trustees and agents."

"But it will not always be so?"

"No, not when I am of age, I suppose. It amuses me to see that the gardener begins to inquire what flowers I wish to have in the beds, and the housekeeper actually asked me this morning which rooms she was to get ready for you. I think my aunt had

told her to do so. If you are not comfortable you must complain of me, you see."

"We will complain *to* you in that case," Eliza answered, smiling; "but from what I saw of them before I came out, there is not much chance of our being discontented, I think."

"Oh, no, they are quite charming," Jane added.

"Come this way," Annie said, "I want to get some flowers. Do you not like wearing natural flowers in your hair in the country?" And she led the way to the conservatory, where, somewhat to the dismay of the old gardener, who was watering the plants, she gathered a handful of red and white camelias, which she gave to her friends.

"You have not kept any for yourself," Eliza said.

"Yes, this white one," Annie replied; "I have so much hair that I can only wear in it one little sprig or flower."

"It is really very hard in these days," Eliza said, laughing, "for those who have a great deal of hair of their own. Nobody gives them credit for it."

"Don't you believe in mine?" Annie exclaimed. "Look." She took off her bonnet and comb, and masses of jet black hair fell on her shoulders and halfway down her back.

"Indeed, I believed in yours without this ocular demonstration," Eliza answered. "I know you well enough to feel sure that you would not wear anything false."

"I see nothing false in wearing false hair," Jane said, "any more than artificial flowers. It is the fashion, and everybody does it."

"Everybody does it!" Eliza repeated. "The worst reason in the world! Don't you think so, Annie?"

Annie had twisted up her hair, and stuck the white camelia behind her ear. "It is not a reason I care

about," she answered. "It is nothing to me what people say or do; but I agree so far with Jane that it prevents there being any deceit in the matter. There is the dressing-bell! Are you long getting ready?"

"Oh, dear, no!" both the sisters replied. Is there any one who ever honestly answers "yes" to that question?

"Have you company at dinner to-day?" Jane inquired, with a view to the choice between her blue silk and her white muslin gown.

"Only Mr. Hendon, Mr. Pratt, our clergyman, and my cousin Edgar. Not a very formidable party, you see. What are you counting on your fingers, Jane?"

"That makes seven?"

"Well, and what of that?"

"I can never open my lips at dinner where there are fewer than eight persons."

"You don't say so? Why, at the *cours* you used to be one of the quickest at answering. I remember being quite jealous at the number of presidencies you got. 'Mademoiselle a la langue très bien pendue,' some of the girls said when they thought you took the shine out of them."

"Oh, Annie, slang!" Eliza exclaimed. "It is not pardonable in you who have no brothers."

Annie laughed, and answered, "Take care, Lizzie. I shall be on the watch, and I venture to say I shall detect you using some slang expression before the day is over."

"We shall have to define what is slang, and what is not," Eliza answered, with a smile. "Rather a difficult thing I fancy."

"But how long have you been afraid of the sound of your own voice, Jane?" Annie asked.

"I do not mind answering a question, but I do not

like to converse with my neighbours when everybody can hear what I say."

"But do you think they listen? I find it difficult enough to attend to what is said to myself. I should never think of listening to what was said to other people. Should you, Lizzie?"

"Oh, as to Lizzie," Jane exclaimed, "she knows every word everybody utters all round the table. And that is another thing; I cannot bear her to hear what I say."

"Why?"

"Because I know she thinks it all so stupid."

"Really, Jane, you are too humble," Annie said.

"Or too vain," Eliza added, with a smile.

"It is getting very late," Jane observed. And, as that remark was undoubtedly to the point, they all ran into the house, and up to their rooms.

"Are you ready, dearest love?" Mrs. Gerald asked, as she knocked at her niece's door at a few minutes before seven. Annie appeared dressed for dinner, and looking very handsome. They went downstairs together. The windows of the drawing-room were wide open, and when they came in a young man, who was walking on the terrace, hastened to meet them. This was Edgar Derwent, Mrs. Gerald's nephew and Annie's cousin. They both seemed very glad to see him; there was, however, something a little reproachful in the tone with which Mrs. Gerald said, "I was almost afraid you would not come. We fully expected you would arrive by the four o'clock train, and I went in the pony-chaise to the station in hopes of finding you there, and having the pleasure of driving you home. But I suppose you did not think we should expect you by that train?"

"To say the truth, I did not know when you would expect me; but I could not leave London by an earlier train."

"It was fortunate Annie did not volunteer to fetch you. She would not at all have liked to be disappointed. I have lived long enough to know that people can never get away from London till the very last possible minute."

Edgar smiled good humouredly, and said, "If I had come when you expected me, I should have had a much pleasanter drive than in that creeping fly, which went at the rate of four miles an hour, I think."

"And you would have had the society of two young ladies," Annie said; "that is, if you had happened to sit in the same carriage with them."

"Friends of yours coming here?" he asked.

"Yes; the Miss Conways. I have known them a long time. We were always meeting at M. Roche's *cours*."

"Are they daughters of Mr. Conway, a barrister?"

"Yes, their father is a lawyer; they live in Bryanston Square."

"I know him, and I am very glad his daughters are friends of yours."

"Mr. Hendon and Mr. Pratt are also coming to dinner. There is Mr. Pratt in his gig coming up the avenue."

A moment afterwards both those gentlemen, who had driven up to the door at the same time, were announced. Just as dinner was on the table, the Miss Conways came down. It had taken a long time to fasten the camelias in their hair. Jane explained this to Mr. Pratt, who took her in to dinner, and she also defended herself warmly from the charge of unpunctuality, which, in a rather pointed though jesting tone, Mrs. Gerald had made against her and her sister.

If it had not been for Mrs. Gerald's exertions, there would have been very little conversation during dinner; she had managed to keep it going, and to start subjects generally suitable, rather than particularly inter-

esting. She was a warm-hearted and well-informed person, but her manners were stiff and her language studied. Her voice, too, was always pitched in the same key, and the use of set phrases had become so habitual with her that it had grown into a second nature. It is said that Mrs. Siddons and all the Kembles acquired so strong a habit of using Shaksperian expressions in ordinary conversation, that they did it at last unconsciously. Mrs. Gerald, without any effort, talked like a well-written book. Is it our own fault that we find this tedious—more tedious than many a worse defect? There was, however, much difference of opinion as to her powers of agreeableness; some people thought her very clever. There was no doubt that she acquitted herself extremely well at tenants' dinners or school-examinations, when she made fluent little speeches in what the schoolmaster called a mellifluous voice, and the housekeeper generally informed the ladies' maids, the first evening they were at Holmwood, that her lady read prayers beautifully. "It was quite a treat to hear her." But if Mrs. Gerald's voice and her way of expressing herself were under strict control, not so her countenance, which, by a singular contrast, manifested with strange clearness the various emotions of a quick temper and keenly susceptible nature. She easily changed colour, her lips sometimes quivered, and her eyes filled with tears on apparently trifling occasions. She had been very pretty, and was still good looking. She had light-blue eyes, a small aquiline nose, and thin lips. There was in her disposition a mixture of impulsiveness and of reserve, of coldness of manner and impetuosity of character. In theory she worshipped common sense, and what the French call *les convenances de la vie*. She was very severe on any follies of conduct or aberrations of mind in others, and was rather prone

to read lectures to her friends on the faults she observed in their characters and proceedings; but under this worldly-wise exterior were hidden many of the weaknesses of a womanly and ardent nature.

Mrs. Gerald had been a widow for more than twenty years. Her husband had died of a fever at Nice a few months after their marriage; and although she had not been supposed to be excessively attached to him, she grieved deeply over his loss, and never thought of marrying again.

The person she had always most loved was her eldest brother, Robert Derwent, Annie's father; and one of her strongest feelings was her passionate fondness for the home of her childhood, and the old family place of the Derwents.

After the death of her idolized brother and his young wife, who had perished by a terrible accident which occurred about a year after she had lost her husband, Mrs. Gerald fixed all her affection on their infant daughter, of whom she was left sole guardian. Holmwood devolved to this child, though a girl, her father having been the last of the entail. His younger brother, Herbert, was Edgar Derwent's father. Mrs. Gerald devoted herself to her niece with all the energy and exclusiveness belonging to her character. Little Annie's health and education, and the care of her property, were the only objects she lived for.

Annie was four years old when her aunt brought her for the first time to Holmwood. They stayed there almost constantly till she was about fourteen; then they began to spend some time every year in London for the sake of masters, and to attend the *cours*, which were beginning to be in fashion. It was there she had made acquaintance with the Conways. Jane was her own age, Eliza older. As soon as her aunt told her that she was old enough to invite her

own friends to Holmwood, which she had done about the time our story begins, Annie had proposed to ask the Conways. Mrs. Gerald had avoided till then giving that invitation. Perhaps she thought Eliza likely to gain influence over Annie, and, without owning it to herself, had a secret jealousy on that point. However, when Annie pressed it, she saw no reason to object, and in that, as in everything else, Annie had her own way.

Any one who had only judged Mrs. Gerald by hearing her talk, would have fancied her to be the last person in the world likely to spoil any one. She was so sensible in her theories of education, so judicious in her views of moral and intellectual training, so severe on the weakness and folly of the generality of parents, that it would have been natural to suppose that Annie's education would have been systematic and strict, if not severe. But far from it—the lectures freely given to the rest of mankind were scarcely ever bestowed on her own niece. She literally worshipped her, and expected that others should join in that worship. It was easy to perceive that she was always on the watch to see if the idol of her heart was sufficiently admired. There was something touching in this over-weening affection, because it was not selfish; not in one sense at least. Perhaps it engrossed too much of her heart; perhaps it made her hard, indifferent, and exacting towards others; but as regarded herself it was self-sacrificing and disinterested. She would have offered up the whole human race as a holocaust, if it could have ensured Annie's happiness; but she would have readily laid herself also at the top of the pile. She had no jealousy of those Annie loved, if only they loved Annie as much as she thought they ought. When this was the case, she gladly admitted them to offer up incense at the shrine of her idol.

The habit Mrs. Gerald had of constantly looking at Annie through her spy-glass, might have been annoying to the young girl had she not been so accustomed to it from childhood, that she hardly noticed it. She did not seem at all aware that her aunt was fonder of her than the generality of parents, aunts, or guardians are wont to be of their children, nieces, or wards. She loved Mrs. Gerald, and knew she had taken great care of her all her life, but looked upon that care and affection rather as a matter of course. At nineteen years of age, she had all the simplicity, straightforwardness, and brusquerie of a girl of twelve. There was a great deal to admire in Annie's looks, and yet it was not everybody that thought her handsome. She had a well-shaped head and magnificent dark hair, a good figure, a way of walking and holding her head which made her French dancing-master say, "Mademoiselle a le port d'une déesse." But her hands and feet were large—her complexion pale, though healthy—her mouth rather wide. She had large, honest, bright, fearless blue eyes, whose innocently bold expression and confiding gaze, together with the guileless simplicity of her manner, reminded one of Dryden's lines—

> "Without unspotted, innocent within,
> She feared no danger, for she knew no sin."

Annie and her cousin Edgar had been great friends ever since she could remember. She had always cared for him, in fact, more than for anybody else in the world. As long as she had been a child her power over him had been absolute. Afterwards this state of things became reversed; a girl from the age of thirteen to seventeen naturally looks up with some degree of awe to a young man four or five years older than herself. Now again she felt there would be

another change in their relative positions. They had not met for a long time, and in the meanwhile she had come out, an old-fashioned expression still in use, but hardly applicable in the present day, when even little girls are oftener out of the school-room than in it.

In Annie's case it meant dining late with Mrs. Gerald instead of at one o'clock with her governess, and dressing in a manner more accordant with the existing fashion than had been till then considered necessary. But the change had made her, of course, a much more important person, and she flattered herself that Edgar would now talk to her as much as to her aunt. There was a heightened colour in her cheeks, and a bright look in her eyes, when she shook hands with her tall pale cousin. The last time he had been at Holmwood, she had been somewhat vexed and mortified at the little notice he had taken of her. She was too old at that time to be played with, and he was perhaps not old enough to like the trouble of conversing with a young girl between sixteen and seventeen, who had suddenly become shy and reserved with him. Since then he had travelled abroad, Mrs. Gerald and Annie had been a great deal away from home, and they had in consequence seldom met, but now for several months he had been studying for the bar in London, and had gladly accepted his aunt's invitation to spend some time with them in the country. He was delighted at the thoughts of seeing the place again, which had been to him in boyhood a sort of earthly Paradise, and at renewing his former intimate intercourse with the only relatives that were dear to him, besides his mother whom he loved, but with whom he had but little sympathy. Annie was very happy to meet again her old playmate and companion, and at the same time felt as if they were for the first time really to make acquain-

tance with each other, for now they were both grown up, and would be on a different footing together.

When he took her in to dinner, she felt pleased and a little excited. Any kind of feelings with her rose slowly to the surface. It was like one of those great waves which surge up from the depths of the sea, and are slow to break because of their strength.

They did not talk much during dinner, but as soon as Edgar came into the drawing-room he sat down by her at the table where she was working with her two friends. "How soon you have come," she said, looking up with a bright smile.

"Too soon?" he added, smiling also.

"Oh, no; I did not mean that. On the contrary, I was afraid Mr. Pratt and Mr. Hendon would have kept you ages in the dining-room."

"What are you working?" Edgar asked, taking up a corner of the bit of stuff on her knees.

"A child's pinafore," she answered; "I can do nothing but plain work. But look at that wonderful thing Eliza is making."

Edgar glanced at the piece of silk in Miss Conway's hand. He smiled as his eyes met hers, and looking towards the card table where Mrs. Gerald, Mr. Hendon, and Mr. Pratt were about to sit down to whist, he said, in a low voice, "What would Mr. Pratt say to that piece of work?"

"Would not he approve?" Eliza inquired.

"Approve of a vestment? The very sight of it, I think, would give him a nervous attack."

"I am so sorry," she answered. "Perhaps I had better put it by."

At that moment Mrs. Gerald asked Miss Conway if she could play at whist; and, when Eliza said "Yes," she exclaimed, "Then do come and save us from dummy; we are so tired of him."

Eliza immediately complied, and in a few minutes Jane inquired if the pianoforte was Erard's or Collard's; upon which hint Annie spoke, and begged her to play "that pretty thing *Le Zéphir;*" and then Edgar and she began to converse comfortably under cover of the rattling execution of Jane's well-practised fingers. Each time a piece came to an end, Annie said, "How pretty that is! Won't you play that other pretty thing, Jane?" and the pleasant noise and the agreeable conversation went on in perfect harmony.

"Annie, how beautiful Holmwood is looking," Edgar said, drawing aside a little the curtain of the window near which they were sitting. The moon was shining on the lawn, on the grove, and on the river, which was glittering in its rays like a ribbon of liquid silver. It was nearly as bright as day. "It is almost a shame," he added, "to be indoors on such a night as this!"

"I am glad you admire Holmwood as much as ever," Annie said. "I think it is in great beauty just now."

"I much more than admire it; I love it as if it was a person. I am afraid I should dislike any one who did not appreciate Holmwood. To my mind there is no place in the world to be compared to it."

"That is saying too much. There must be some very beautiful places in the world, if we are to believe travellers."

"I am sure everybody would admit it to be one of the loveliest places in England."

"Now you are getting more reasonable. England is a small part of the world."

"Well, England is the world to me. I see the beauties of other countries—I feel those of my own. If ever I write a novel, I shall begin by describing Holmwood."

"What will you say about it?"

"That it is an old house, but not a gloomy one. That not even the moonlight can make it look sad, which is saying a great deal. Just before dinner, Annie, I walked round the garden, and thought it all looked so pretty, prettier than ever. I delight in that dear old court, the vine, the fig-trees, the sun-dial, and the sunflowers, the holly-hocks, the pigeon-house, and, more than everything else, the archway and its inscription."

"Oh, so do I. I repeat it very often—*Nisi Dominus edificavit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui edificant eam.*"

"Very well pronounced for a woman, Annie," exclaimed Edgar, laughing. "I am so glad to find that you are worthy to possess this beautiful place of yours. You used not, I think, to be so fond of it."

"I remember your being very angry with me three years ago, because I was glad to go to London. You always used to scold me for not liking it enough."

"Yes, I know I am touchy on that point. Holmwood not only reminds me of the happiest days of my life, but it is to me the type of the most beautiful descriptions of scenery in the old English poets, and of the good old times in English country life."

"Good old times! Well, I never shall understand . . . ."

"What, I wonder!"

"I say I don't understand, and never shall, why people will always call old times good times. Even the Greeks and Romans did so."

"The Greeks and Romans? why, Annie, I did not know you were a classical scholar!"

"Nonsense. I am not a scholar at all—but one of the good things of these poor new times is that one learns a little of everything."

"I should say that it was one of the bad things of the present day, and the reason why so few people now know anything really well."

"But you will not deny that ever since good books have been written they always speak of the past in that way. I dare say a hundred or two hundred years hence our great grand-children, if such people ever exist, will be sighing over the wickedness of the twentieth or twenty-first century, and calling *this* time the good old time."

"Well, the world may have really grown so wicked by that time, that the present age may in comparison seem good to them."

"But I do not believe that the world is getting so wicked—worse, I mean, than it used to be."

"Do you know much about the world, Annie?"

"I have read with Miss Rose no end of histories of the world—Greek, Roman, French, English, ancient and modern histories. It is rather hard to be told after that that I know nothing about it."

"I only asked the question. I hope you will never know much more of its wickedness than you learned in the school-room. But we have lost sight of my novel."

"Let us go back to it. You have described the house; you must now say something of the people who live in it."

"Oh, I did not bargain for that. How could I, for instance, describe the mistress of Holmwood to her face?"

"The mistress of Holmwood! How funny that sounds! I who am not even my own mistress."

"No, really? I thought you had always managed to have your own way ever since you were born."

"Now that is just the sort of thing people choose to suppose. You would not at all fancy giving up

your own will as often as I do. But never mind about that, I want you to describe me. It will be like looking into a glass . . . ."

"And then going away, as the Bible says . . . ."

"Forgetting what manner of creature I am? Very likely; but as I am not obliged to believe in you as much as in the Bible, or even in the looking-glass, I will take my chance, and hear what you have to say of me. Here is a pencil and a bit of paper. Begin and imagine you are writing a book."

Edgar mused a moment, with a half pensive, half amused expression of countenance, as if collecting his thoughts; and then wrote rapidly, stopping now and then to read *sotto voce* what he had scribbled. "This enchanting abode, the sylvan beauties of which bring to our recollection some of the prettiest descriptions in Sir Philip Sydney's 'Arcadia,' owns for its mistress a young lady. . ."

"Do not call me a young *lady*."

"Well a young woman . . . .

"That is still worse."

"A young girl."

"That sounds as if I was not more than fifteen."

". . . . the descendant of one of the oldest families in the county of . . . ."

"But I don't know if it is one of the oldest families . . . ."

"Well, let that pass, as we are writing a novel . . . . and one of the handsomest girls . . . ."

"I do not like to be called handsome, it is so much nicer to be pretty."

"Her blue eyes and jet black hair give a somewhat peculiar character to her . . . . *prettiness*. Her smile is charming—her frown awful. If her mouth *is* rather wide . . . ."

"I did not know it was."

". . . . this defect is redeemed by the most brilliant white teeth . . . ."

"Come, I don't want to hear any more of that nonsense. It is my character I wish described."

"But I have not seen anything of it for two years. It may be quite changed since that time."

"Say what you thought of it then, and I will tell you if it is changed."

"Well, the merits of this young lady are, first, a very honest, truthful nature. She would sooner have her head cut off than tell an untruth. She never beats about the bush to gain her end, but goes straight at it, even through thorns and briars. She has, on the whole, a very good temper, but, like some climates we read of, it is subject to rather violent storms. There is a little stubbornness and not a little pride in her character. She likes better to oblige others than to own herself obliged to any one; and when she is offended at anything . . . ."

"Oh, now I know what you are going to say!"

"No, I am sure you don't."

"Yes; you will say I am then like Helvellyn."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Don't you remember that you used to tease me by repeating when I was angry that line that teaches children to pronounce the letter H—

'How high Helvellyn holds his haughty head!'"

"I assure you that I had quite forgotten that old piece of impertinence of mine, and that now I should not think of saying anything so rude."

"I suppose your description of my character is a true one, and that it will be so to the end of my life. I don't believe in characters changing."

"Surely faults can be cured."

"Have you ever known an ill-tempered person become good-humoured, or a lazy one active?"

"Yes, I have observed great changes of that kind; and, moreover, I believe the best tempers are those which have been made so by effort and self-conquest, and that the most indefatigable activity is that of an indolent person who has become hard-working."

"How do you account for this?"

"By the fact that mere natural good qualities are not made of such solid stuff as those acquired with labour and difficulty; and then distrust of self is the first condition of perseverance in goodness."

"That may be so. But still I think natural sweetness of temper would always be more attractive than the acquired self-control you speak of."

"Perhaps so; but attractiveness is a poor sort of merit after all. It is a charm, but not a virtue."

"It is like sunshine, I think; whereas the other kind of good temper is like gas-light or candle-light—always the same, but without warmth or brightness."

"I think I could convince you of the contrary. Think the matter over, and watch those two sorts of dispositions."

"I will. Every time I make a new acquaintance, I shall try to discover if they were born good-tempered or made themselves so; and I will tell you which I find the pleasantest."

"By the way, talking of new acquaintances, have you seen yet Mr. Hendon's sister-in-law, Lady Emily?"

"No, she does not arrive till to-morrow. It is a great many years since she has been at Marchbanks."

"I heard in London that she has a young girl with her."

"Yes; Mr. Hendon told us about her. She is the daughter, I believe, of some friends of Lady Emily's

who died abroad. Her name is Miss Flower. We shall be obliged to see a great deal of her, I suppose."

"I have heard that your friend Miss Conway is a very delightful person."

"Oh, yes; she is so good and clever, and not tiresome about it."

Edgar laughed.

"Well, but some good and clever people *are* tiresome. I think, if it is not high treason to say so, that Lady Emma Cars is one of them. She is not pleasantly good, like Eliza."

"I dare say not; I am very glad you like Miss Conway."

"Ah! I see they have finished their rubber. I wonder who won. Mr. Pratt, have you won?"

"No, Miss Annie, I have lost eighteen-pence. But it was not Fortune's fault. I revoked, and my partner bore it like an angel."

"I was only too glad," Eliza said, with a smile, "that that one great crime covered my numerous misdeeds."

The good clergyman smiled too, and soon afterwards took his leave. He was a venerable, gentle-looking old man, with a kind and simple manner which prepossessed every one in his favour. When he had left the room, Mr. Hendon said—

"Dear old Pratt is much aged lately."

"He has had many annoyances this year," Mrs. Gerald answered. "When he went away last spring, the young curate who did duty for him introduced into his church some of the novelties which are now the fashion, and when he came back many of his parishioners were not at all pleased that he suppressed them."

Eliza Conway's face flushed a little, and Edgar bit his lip.

"Was daily service one of those innovations?" he asked.

"Yes," his aunt replied. "And early communion, too, on Sundays. And then Mr. Rolles put a cross of flowers over the altar, and made a wretched attempt at teaching the school children to chant. This sort of thing should not be attempted unless it can be done properly. Our beautiful Liturgy, when it is well read, is far more impressive than abortive attempts at a choral service."

"But does not that depend on the sort of persons whom we wish should be impressed?" Edgar said. "Paintings and music, which appear to us very imperfect, often may and do excite devotion in uneducated people."

"Of course they do," Mr. Hendon cried. "I have seen peasants abroad praying most fervently before some ugly, tawdrily-dressed image of the Madonna, which would have made educated persons smile."

"But I do not call that ignorant fervour real devotion," Mrs. Gerald exclaimed.

"Well, I remember," Mr. Hendon said, "observing one day a woman kneeling at Lagheto before a statue of the Virgin, praying with outstretched arms and streaming eyes. She cried over and over again, 'Madre mia, ho quattro fanciulli, e sono fuor di testa. Capisce, Madre mia?' ('My mother, I have four children, and I am out of my mind. Do you understand me, my mother?') There was something in that simple statement of a terrible fact, and the urgency with which it was repeated by the poor insane creature, that seemed to me more like real prayer than anything I have ever heard or witnessed in our churches."

"I suppose," Mrs. Gerald rejoined, "that a rational religion would not suit the insane, but you must excuse me if I think that this is no reflection upon it."

"Have we not all a 'petit coin de folie,' which it would be well to take oftener into account?" Mr. Hendon said.

"Surely," Edgar began—he was fond of beginning his sentences in that way—"surely, we may impart beauty to our services, and enlist imagination, which is, after all, one of God's greatest gifts to men, in the cause of religion, and yet avoid the blamable lengths to which Roman Catholics carry outward practices of devotion."

"I do not myself object to anything in good taste," Mrs. Gerald said.

"I did not like what Mr. Rolles did," Annie observed, "because it vexed dear Mr. Pratt, and he said things about him I cannot forgive. He called him a heretic. I am sure he is much more of a heretic himself."

"Are you certain, Annie," Edgar whispered, "that you know what it means to be a heretic?"

"It is something bad," she quickly answered, "and I know no one so good as Mr. Pratt."

Edgar was preparing to answer that argument, but Mrs. Gerald changed the subject by asking Mr. Hendon how long it was since Lady Emily had been at Marchbanks.

"More than twenty-two years," he replied.

"This is the first time since my brother's death that I have been able to prevail upon her to pay me a visit. I hope she will spend all the autumn with me, and that it will be a fine one. She has lived so entirely abroad, and is so delicate, that I am rather anxious about her. You remember Lady Emily, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. We used to meet very often in former days."

"I hope Miss Derwent will be pleased with my

sister-in-law's adopted daughter, Miss Flower. If she is as attractive now as she was when I last saw her, four or five years ago, she must be a very engaging little person."

Mrs. Gerald said she was sure Annie would be delighted to make acquaintance with Miss Flower.

Annie made no remark.

As Mr. Hendon was going away, he said, "I hear the Carsdales are going to give a ball for Lord Carsdown's coming of age."

"So I have been told," Mrs. Gerald said. "If we are asked, I think we must go. It will be, strange to say, Annie's first ball."

"I may tell Lady Emily you will soon come to see her?"

"Certainly, I will," Mrs. Gerald answered, and then Mr. Hendon departed.

The ladies lighted their candles, and went to bed. Edgar walked on the terrace, and smoked a cigar. The night was beautiful—the sky perfectly cloudless and starry. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves—no sound reached the ear except the murmur of the little river.

"Dear, dear old place, I love you better than ever!" he thought, or perhaps exclaimed, for the window of Annie's room was open, and she heard, or fancied she heard, him say those words; and she smiled as she looked at the view, which she had never before admired half as much.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Gerald went into Annie's room, as she often did the last thing at night. She found her, having just closed the window, and sitting before her dressing-table in a pensive attitude. She kissed her, and said —"I hope you have been amused and happy to-night, my darling?"

"Yes, very happy indeed. I am so glad Edgar likes Eliza. I thought he would. We are such a snug, comfortable party just as we are, I hope nobody else will come. Oh, Aunt Gerald! that Miss Flower! Shall we be obliged to see much of her?"

"It will be difficult to help it. But let us hope for the best; from what Mr. Hendon said she is likely to be pleasing. Perhaps she will prove a pleasant addition to our society."

"I do not want any additions to it."

"You did not take too long a walk to-day? I hope you did not overtire yourself?"

It was one of Mrs. Gerald's peculiarities to be in constant fear of fatigue for Annie, who was really as strong as a little horse.

"Tired," she exclaimed, bursting out laughing; "what, with walking once round the Park! You know I am never tired when I am amused."

"You seemed to get on very well this evening with Edgar. I never saw you talk so much to any one before, I think, except the Conways."

"It is very easy to talk to him. It seemed so natural. Don't you think he is grown very handsome?"

"Yes, and he looks so refined— so distinguished."

"And you can't think how enthusiastic he is about Holmwood. He does not think I am half as fond of it as I ought to be."

"I hope he is mistaken there, dearest Annie; I flatter myself you are getting every day more alive to its beauties, more grateful for the possession of such a place, and more anxious to fulfil your duties towards those whom Providence has, in a certain sense, placed under your care."

"Oh yes. Did you remember to speak to Davis about the croquet ground? Jane would like to play, I know."

"He will come to-morrow morning to receive your directions about it."

"I must go after breakfast to-morrow to the East Lodge to see Nancy Drake; Mr. Pratt says she wants some broth. Edgar will walk there with Eliza and me."

"You must not go there if she has a fever, my love."

"She has broken her leg. That is not catching," Annie replied, looking at her aunt in a triumphant manner.

Mrs. Gerald kissed her over and over again, and then wished her good-night. Before going to bed she wrote the following letter to Miss Rose, who had been Annie's governess. She was now settled in London as a music-mistress.

"My dear Miss Rose,—I must write a few lines to tell you that Edgar arrived today. As far as I can judge, he is as much as ever all I could wish. Amiable and pleasing in manner, and, moreover, much handsomer than I used to think he would be. There is great beauty in the expression of his brow and eyes,

and something refined and intellectual in his countenance, which recalled to my recollection Mrs. Norton's lines—

> 'Pale to transparency the pensive face,
> Pale not with sickness but with studious thought,
> The body tasked—the fine mind overwrought.
> With something faint and fragile in the whole,
> As though 'twere but a lamp to hold a soul.'

"Annie seems delighted with her cousin, and shows it in her own charming, unaffected manner. It would be a great happiness to me if the affection which always existed between her and Edgar as children should now assume a different character, and they were to marry. It has always been my wish, and I am giving him now, as it were, the first chance of winning this great prize, which so many would try for if I allowed them the opportunity. I know so well the strength of Edgar's principles and the goodness of his heart, that I should not hesitate to confide Annie's happiness to his keeping. Of course, few girls would have so many opportunities of marrying in what is called a brilliant manner as this dear child. But that is the very reason why I dread taking her into society, where she would become an object of interest and pursuit to persons bent on making or mending their fortunes, and run the risk of attaching herself to a man not sincerely devoted to her.

"There is another reason, perhaps a foolish one, which makes me, I own, very much wish her to marry Edgar. If it had not been for her narrow escape from death when a baby, he would have inherited this large property and this place, which you know he is so passionately fond of. Twice she was nearly dying: on that fatal day when both her parents perished; and again, a year or two afterwards, by a long lingering illness. When she was slowly recovering at Nice, where

she spent the early years of her life, Edgar came there with his mother, the present Mrs. Langdon. His father (my brother Herbert) had not long survived poor Robert and his wife. He was then a little fellow, about six or seven years of age, and proved at that time the greatest of comforts to his tiny cousin. She was so delicate that I could not venture to let her play with other children, but he was so gentle and sensible that he could be trusted with her, and the society of her young companion did her more good than any medicine. I dated her recovery from the time when she began to play with him in the garden of the Villa Bianca. They used to stay out for hours together, creeping under the orange-trees, building houses with cones, or digging trenches in the sand. I can see them now; the strong rosy boy full of health and vigour, and the pale wee toddling creature trotting after him, or sitting on his knees, looking like a wax doll. He seeming almost afraid of hurting the fragile little thing, by touching her, while she cuffed him and tyrannized over him with all the pretty despotism of indulged infancy. Even then I remember thinking that they might perhaps one day marry, and possess together this place which neither of my brothers lived to enjoy. This evening, seventeen years afterwards, here at Holmwood, as I saw them sitting together on the sofa near the window, I was musing on the change which time had wrought. The pale, delicate infant grown into our healthy blooming Annie, and the robust, rosy boy of former days turned into a grave, thoughtful-looking man. Both still handsome, each in their way, but so different from what they were as children. And now you may imagine, dear Miss Rose, how anxiously I wait to see what course things will take.

"You sometimes see Edgar's mother. I should have no objection to your giving her a hint of my feelings

on the subject. Under the circumstances it is clear that he could hardly think of such a thing himself without some very decided encouragement from Annie herself and from me. What amount of encouragement she may give him remains to be seen, but there would be no harm in his knowing that if she wished to marry him I should offer no opposition to that wish.

"I have never been on terms of intimacy with my sister-in-law. I could not speak, and still less write, to her on the subject; but a remark which would seem to come from yourself might be a sufficient hint, and yet not commit us in any way.

"I will soon write again, for I know how anxious you are to hear everything about Annie. I wish you were here; I miss our conversations in the school-room; you are the only person to whom I can speak of her without reserve.

"Yours affectionately,

"M. GERALD."

When Mrs. Gerald had written, sealed, and directed this letter, she went to one side of her bed-room and drew aside a silk curtain which covered the pictures of several members of her family who were dead. She kept their portraits in a sort of sacred seclusion. What to many persons is a consolation—the hourly sight, amidst the occupations and business, the joys and trials of life, of loved faces which were once the objects of hopes or of cares which made life happy or anxious, of faces never again to be seen in this world—was to Mrs. Gerald a pain too acute to endure. She never would look at them except when alone. Amongst these pictures there was one of Annie's mother, with Annie herself in her arms when a baby of a few months old. It had been painted in Florence a short time before Mrs. Derwent's death. Annie

used sometimes to go into her aunt's room, when she knew she was out, to have a good look at these family portraits. There was a half-length picture of her father, and some small sketches of him as a boy. One also of Edgar's father, of Mrs. Gerald's parents, and her husband. That evening the curtain was lifted up, and Mrs. Gerald stood for a few minutes gazing first on one and then on the other of those pictures, with a thoughtful, scrutinizing look. Especially she fixed her eyes long and wistfully on the portrait of Annie's mother, and sighed deeply as she turned away.

On the following morning, Jane and Annie played duets together, Eliza wrote letters in her room, and Edgar read in the library. When at about one o'clock Annie came in to fetch a book for her aunt, he looked up and said, "Are you a worthy possessor of this delightful library, Annie? Do you make much use of these charming books?"

She shook her head, and answered with a smile, "'Vous vous moquez de moi,' as M. Legrand said when I asked him if he could teach me the figure of an English country dance. No, I have not, unfortunately, any taste for reading."

"You don't say so? I could hardly have believed this possible for any one brought up by Aunt Gerald."

"She cannot believe it herself. I assure you that she labours under the illusion that I read a great deal —at odd times, she says. I have heard her tell people so. Have you not observed that she has a wonderful talent for believing whatever she wishes? It provokes me very much sometimes. I don't know if it is right or not to let people go on thinking things are true when they are not so, if it gives them pleasure."

"If the illusion does not do them nor any one else harm, I suppose you are not bound to dispel it."

"Oh, as to dispelling Aunt Gerald's notions, it

would be quite labour thrown away to attempt it. All I can do is to protest against them."

"Suppose you were, in this one instance, to turn her illusion into a reality."

"By reading more, you mean? Well, perhaps I may try that some day. I suppose a library is quite a paradise to you?"

"It is a great enjoyment, and this particular library is such an available one. The books are so close at hand, so easily reached, and so well arranged. There is a combined smell of flowers and of books here which is very delightful, and I have been reading since breakfast without a single interruption."

"Did not the playing in the next room disturb you?"

"Not at all. The quadrilles did not interfere in the least with my enjoyment of the 'Idylls.'"

"What! were you reading doleful poems? I wonder, then, that our merry tunes did not bother you."

"No, gay music always gives me a feeling of pleasant sadness—if those two words can go together—so there was no discordancy between the impressions produced by Tennyson's poetry. . . . ."

"And our strumming! Well, I'm glad of it."

"Is music your favourite occupation?"

"No, what I like best is work—plain work, at least. Gardening also amuses me, but there is such a fuss made about my not standing in the sun, or in the wet, that it ends by being tiresome. I believe I like nothing so much as riding. Will you ride with me this afternoon? I want to take you to see the new road across the Park, and the summer-house we have built at the top of Lonehill."

"I shall like it very much. Do your friends ride too?"

"Jane does, and Eliza will drive in the pony chaise with Aunt Gerald."

So Annie had planned, and so it happened, except that Jane had a headache, and would not go out; so she and her cousin had, in consequence, another long conversation, in the course of which she found out that he was very High Church, which vexed her a little. Not that she had any clear ideas herself on the subject of churches, high or low, or broad, but because he would not now, she was afraid, like Mr. Pratt, or Mr. Pratt's sermons, as much as she wished him to do. They stopped at the parsonage on their way home and paid the clergyman a visit. They found him, having just finished his five o'clock dinner, and sitting by the window which overlooked his garden watching his bee-hives, a favourite amusement of his, and one which Annie had often shared. "To go and see Mr. Pratt's bees," had been held out to her, and indeed always proved through her childhood an extraordinary treat. A pleased smile beamed on the old man's face as he saw the cousins dismount and walk up the narrow approach to his house.

"Welcome, Miss Annie," he said. "How do you do, Mr. Edgar? It is some time, Miss Annie, since you have paid my bees and me a visit. 'How doth the little busy bee improve each shining hour.' Eh? Do you remember my teaching you that hymn the first time you ever came to see me after you arrived from abroad?"

"Yes, of course I do; and have not I been ever since 'gathering honey from every opening flower?'"

"Well, my dear, I hope you have. There is a pretty lesson in that line. The world is divided between those who go about gathering honey, like my good bees, and those that sting and leave poison behind them, like idle, mischievous wasps. Have you been showing Mr. Derwent all the new improvements, as you call them? I do not know that I think them all

improvements, but then I am an old man, and I dislike changes and novelties of every kind."

This, he said, kindly but pointedly, as he looked at Edgar, who coloured a little, and replied, "But do you not think it desirable to build up again the ruins of the past?"

"To build up ruins, my dear sir, is a hazardous undertaking, and an imprudent one I think, if, in order to accomplish it, you pull down a good serviceable house, as my friend Mr. Bayley did at Rangeside. In trying to restore part of his mansion, which was old, he pulled to pieces the remainder, which had been inhabited by his father and his ancestors for many generations."

Edgar smiled and said, "You are speaking allegorically I suppose, Mr. Pratt?"

"Well, I confess, my dear sir, I am afraid that with those new ideas of reviving old practices, the good people of this day will pull down our Protestant Church of England and deal a fatal blow to the reformed religion."

Edgar winced at the word Protestant. He had been associating with members of the Church of England who repudiated the name of Protestant, and called Protestantism a heresy. It was very painful to him to hear an Anglican clergyman use that obnoxious word. It vexed, it shocked him very much, and yet what could he say? It was difficult, indeed almost impossible, to give expression to this feeling. To persons of advanced age in England, there is something so preposterous in the idea that the Church which they have always considered to be Protestant, and which was universally accepted as such till within the last few years, is not so, that it would really require some degree of moral courage to make the assertion in their presence. An old-fashioned clergyman of the Church

of England, surrounded by Ritualists, must feel somewhat as a sane man would do if accidentally shut up in a lunatic asylum. Such a one might hear those about him declare so confidently that they were emperors or kings, that he might, after a while, almost question his own sanity in disbelieving their assertions. Perhaps, after all, they might be in their right mind, and he himself insane. Certainly, if anybody had attempted to prove to Mr. Pratt that England was not an island, he would not have been more taken by surprise than by being told that its church was not Protestant.

Edgar felt a consciousness of this, and said nothing in reply to his last remark; and Annie, in order to change the subject, began to speak of the approaching school feast, and of the number of buns and pounds of tea which would be required. She saw her cousin in the meantime taking up one after another the books on the table, and putting them down again with a look of annoyance. This disturbed her calculations, and she had to go over them a second time.

When that part of the business was accomplished, Mr. Pratt said, "I have just seen Mr. Hendon's carriage drive by with Lady Emily in it. She is not as much altered as I should have expected. I should have known her again, though it is now twenty-three years since she went away."

"Did you see if her ward, Miss Flower, was with them?"

"There was a young lady by her side. I did not know who it was."

Edgar made an effort to join in the conversation. "I wonder if there is more of pain or of pleasure in this return after so long an absence."

"I should think there must be a great deal of heartache in it. Mr. Charles Hendon died here quite

suddenly, and he was not the sort of man one would have wished to see die in that way."

"I am curious to know," Annie said, "if I shall like Miss Flower. What did you think of her looks?"

"I scarcely saw her. They passed very quickly, and I was thinking only of Lady Emily."

After a little more talk on various subjects, the young people took leave of Mr. Pratt. He wished them a pleasant ride home. The parsonage was at one end of Holmwood Park, about half a mile from the house.

"By the way," Annie said, turning back, "may I have the key of the church? Edgar wants to go into it, and it is always locked."

"The sexton has got the key, my dear; but there is nothing new to be seen since your cousin was here before."

"But he says that when he was abroad he often went into the churches, which were always open. I think," she added, lowering her voice, "that he likes saying his prayers there."

"Well, my dear, it is always a good thing to pray; but I read in the Bible that we are to go into our closets, and shut the door, that men may not see us praying; and except at the time of public worship, I own I think we may as well keep to that precept. I do not see myself what there is in an empty church to help us in our prayers."

"Nothing certainly," Edgar answered, "unless there are in it objects which excite holy thoughts, and aid us to lift up our souls to God. In many of our churches now we do find such objects."

"You will not find anything Popish in mine, dear Mr. Derwent. God forbid I should speak harshly of any class of Christians, but as long as I live I will resist the introduction amongst us of practices which

lead to errors of doctrine, and to a mode of worship quite inconsistent with the spirit of our reformed church."

Edgar did not make any reply, but looked pained. Annie got upon her horse. Her old friend gathered a bunch of Banksia roses, and as he gave them to her whispered—

"You can have the key of the church, my dear, as often as you want it. I am always glad to find a young man caring about saying his prayers, wherever it may be; and your cousin seems a thoughtful kind of person, not giddy—'fast,' I think, they call it now-a-days—as so many young people are. Only I hope he will not make you a Puseyite. I should be sorry, my dear, very sorry, if you were ever to be ashamed of calling yourself a Protestant."

"How could I ever be ashamed of being what *you* are!" exclaimed Annie, smiling affectionately on the old man. "But I am glad you are not displeased with Edgar. I want you to like him, because," she lowered her voice a little, and added, "because I like him very much—more than ever."

"Mr. Pratt smiled too, and said, as they rode off, "God bless you both."

He stood a moment shading his eyes with his hand from the slanting rays of the afternoon sun; and when they were out of sight he returned to his bee-hives, and sat thoughtfully musing on the visit he had received.

"Dear me!" he murmured to himself, "what a pity it is that young men in our days cannot be contented with reading their Bibles, and being quiet, practical Christians. If they think of their souls at all, they must be taking up all sorts of strange crotchets, and unsettling people's minds. This cousin of my little Annie's seems a good sort of youth, I saw he was

vexed at what I said about the Puseyites; but he did not tell me to my face, as Mr. Rolles did, that I had been teaching heresy all my life, and did not understand the Prayer-book, which I used and loved long before he was born."

Everything seemed to promise well for the fulfilment of Mrs. Gerald's wishes. Edgar had been more than a fortnight at Holmwood. Annie was apparently delighted with his society, and he showed no disinclinatian to prolong his visit. Miss Rose had written that she had not seen Mrs. Langdon since she had received Mrs. Gerald's letter, but that when she had an opportunity of doing so she should not fail to convey the important intimation. Mrs. Gerald did not regret the delay; on the contrary. It would be all the better that a little more time should elapse before the hint was conveyed to Edgar, and there could be no doubt his mother would lose no time in doing so, when once in possession of the fact.

Towards the end of July, several days of almost ceaseless rain confined to the house Annie Derwent and her friends. Time, however, did not hang heavy on their hands. Eliza Conway had plenty to occupy her mind, and Jane had no mind to occupy, or at any rate so small a one that a little stitching, a little music, and a very little thinking were enough to fill it. Mrs. Gerald and Eliza Conway conversed a great deal with Edgar, and Annie listened attentively; less, perhaps, that she cared much for the subject of these conversations, than because she liked to hear her cousin talk. Mrs. Gerald often introduced topics of discourse that related to politics and literature. Edgar and Eliza eagerly entered on these discussions, but did not confine themselves to the limits she would have been inclined to assign to them, such as the state of political parties

and the comparative merits of different books and authors. With the spirit of the present generation strong within them, they plunged into the social and religious questions of the day, and descanted upon them with all the fervour of youth and inexperience, and the ardent interest which the actual state of the world, and our own country in particular, excites in earnest natures. For everything now in politics and literature, whatever relates to the fate of nations or affects the course of legislature, is connected with the creeds of men, and bears directly or indirectly on those all important questions, "Church or no Church," "Faith or no faith," and, as far as the world's verdict goes, "God or no God."

Christianity has never been, perhaps, so openly blasphemed, in the ears of the multitude at least, so intensely hated, so violently attacked, as at the present day; but never, also, has it been less despised and less ignored. Whereas, some of the most popular authors of the beginning of this century could write volume upon volume of fiction with hardly a word in them indicating that the thought of it ever crossed their minds; now scarcely a book of any sort is published which does not take sides for or against religion, or attempt to reconcile the denial of revealed truth with a vague adherence to some nameless faith. Atheism itself has become a sect, and despair a creed. Religious forms of speech are borrowed by the sceptic, and sentimental allusions to an unknown God, wind up with open attacks and covert sneers. On the other hand, no real Christian, of any denomination, can treat of the realities of life, or picture in fiction its mysteries of sorrow and joy, without reference to the supernatural truths which influence the souls of men. While democracy rises like a surging sea, and men feel that, whether for good or for evil, the masses of their fellow-creatures

must gain more and more power, the more eager, strong, intense, becomes the desire of the Christian and the Atheist, of the Catholic and the Infidel, to win them to hold or to deny, to retain or to abjure the faith which stands like a battered fortress, incessantly assailed by fresh enemies, but eternally defended by new combatants. The immense change in England with regard to the books which take the greatest hold on the mind of youthful readers of the better sort, of those that shun in fiction unwholesome excitement, is strikingly exemplified when we contrast the works of Miss Edgeworth with those of Miss Sewell, those of Miss Austin with Miss Yonge's. Even Sir Walter Scott's novels have almost ceased to charm the present generation. Stirring descriptions of historical events, glowing pictures of the pageantries of past ages, have far less interest, even for the young, than the analysis of character and revelations of a hidden life, which are often contained in the writings of the present day. Whatever treats of inward conflicts, secret perplexities, and the various trials of individual minds and hearts, necessarily commands attention at a moment when anything that can throw light on the difficulties which so many are experiencing may tend, even remotely, to their solution.

Edgar and Miss Conway shared the tendency of their generation in this respect. They had already taken their side in the most important point at issue in the religious community to which they belonged. The revival of Catholic doctrine and practice in the Anglican Church excited to the uttermost their sympathy and enthusiasm. Both of them had been lately living in London, and had been actively engaged in works of charity in connection with the Established Church. Miss Conway was intelligent, well-informed, conscientious—capable of laying down her life had it

been necessary for a principle, a friend, or a fallacy. Although naturally most honest and truthful, she had an extraordinary power of shutting her eyes to the clearest amount of evidence if it told against her own views, and disliked the society of those who differed from her; not from any unamiable feeling towards them, but because it gave her absolute pain to hear a doubt expressed or implied with regard to the theory on which she rested her faith.

Mrs. Gerald, on the contrary, delighted in discussion; she was an extremely candid and liberal person, and objected to no opinions which did not involve disagreeable practical conclusions. She had very great skill in drawing out people in conversation, and leading them to express their ideas, and a way of listening, which conveyed the impression that though she did not altogether agree with them, there was, nevertheless, a great deal in what they said which struck her very much. She always seemed ready to give a favourable construction to the opinions of others, and to allow the most she could for their side of the question. It was in this manner that she lent a willing ear to Edgar's Anglo-Catholic views. At first she had felt uneasy from the fear that some Romish tendencies might exist in his mind. But when she found that he was decidedly averse to Romanism, and that in answer to some remark she made on recent secessions, he made a most energetic protest against what he called the sin of abandoning "the Church of our baptism," she was quite reassured, and, without adopting his opinions, was willing to extend to them the utmost indulgence.

As to Annie, she neither understood, nor approved, nor sympathized with her cousin's opinions; but she admired him. It was quite new to her to hear any one, and especially a young man, speak of religion in

the earnest way he did. She had been used to think it rather a dull subject than otherwise. It had not much occupied her thoughts. She had followed the daily routine to which she had been accustomed from childhood. Whatever Miss Rose had told her was right to do she did, and what Mr. Pratt had taught her she believed. The books through which she had learnt history and ethics, were, on the whole, guiltless of having imparted to her mind any particular shades of opinion, beyond a general idea that Catholicism was wrong, and Protestantism right; but no reflections on the subject, or comparison in her own thoughts between different creeds, had ever disturbed or even occupied her mind. Since she had known Eliza Conway, indeed, she had sometimes felt surprised at her saying things that seemed to her very different from what she had ever learnt in the school-room, or heard from the pulpit; but her attention had not been roused, and she had taken little heed of them. But it was very different now that she listened to Edgar talking "on serious subjects," as Miss Rose used to call them. It was with awe and pleasure, though sometimes with a little uneasiness also, that she watched his eager countenance, when he was broaching what seemed to her new and startling doctrines. Perhaps the very novelty of his opinions interested her in his favour; they implied belief in what was more supernatural than anything she had ever been taught about religion. She did not feel the least inclined to adopt those views; but by a strange, yet not uncommon inconsistency, she liked him the better for holding them.

He was pleased at the attentive way in which she listened to him; for he had been afraid, from what he had heard, that she would take very little interest in the questions he had most at heart. At first he hoped Annie might be easily made into a good churchwoman;

but though she did not oppose anything he said, he soon perceived that he was not making any impression upon her. She did not show any disposition to adopt the opinions of the school to which he belonged. The fact was that her plain, straightforward, unimaginative mind was incapable of admitting the idea that the Protestant Church, in which she had been educated, was, after all, not a Protestant Church. Everything she had ever been taught or read now came back to her mind, and in the midst of Edgar's learned explanations and appeals to antiquity she kept saying sometimes to herself and sometimes aloud, "But for all that, I *am* a Protestant." He was vexed at this one day, and answered, "I am afraid so, Annie." This made her a little angry. Hers was not one of those womanly natures which are always ready to follow in the wake of those they love. If she had been ever so much attached to any one, it would not have influenced her on such points. It might even have induced her to remain more immovably attached to the ideas instilled into her in childhood. Nevertheless, she would have been perhaps less attracted by her cousin, less occupied about him, less inclined to muse over what he said and thought, if he had not held this new faith, or led in many respects a different life from other people; if he had been, like herself, a Christian and a churchman after Mr. Pratt's fashion.

One chilly afternoon, towards the end of the third week in July, Mrs. Gerald was sitting with Annie, over a wood fire in her own room. The conversation turned, not an unusual occurrence, on Edgar's merits.

"There is something so noble, so generous about him," Mrs. Gerald said. "Some of his ideas are a little enthusiastic and eccentric; but this is so often the case with clever people that it does not surprise or alarm me."

"I suppose it is because he is so clever that I sometimes feel frightened when I talk to him."

"Do you feel afraid of him, my love? I thought you seemed quite at your ease with Edgar."

"I am never shy with anybody. It is not that sort of feeling I mean, but I am puzzled by the things he says—about religion, for instance. I cannot argue with him. I am not clever enough. But it is all quite different from what Mr. Pratt thinks, and a clergyman, after all, ought to know best."

"I do not think, my love, that you ought to trouble your mind on that subject. There is such a variety in men's minds that you will hardly find two persons thinking alike on every point, and there are many things about which it is not at all necessary that people should agree."

"Well, perhaps not; but I like things to be settled. I was always sorry there were so many different religions in the world, but it is still worse if in the same church people think so differently."

"They agree in essential points."

"Do you think so? Edgar and Mr. Pratt?"

"They have both signed the Thirty-Nine Articles."

"Oh! the Thirty-Nine Articles! But Edgar wants to do away with them."

"At any rate, they use the same prayers."

"Yes, on Sundays, I suppose they do. But Edgar says prayers that Mr. Pratt would not use on any account. He told me so."

"But those are minor points. There is surely enough to establish sympathy between members of the same church if they believe in the great truths of Christianity and go to the same church."

"Ah, but Edgar says Mr. Pratt does not believe in some great truths of Christianity, and Mr. Hendon believes only in the existence of God and a future

state, and not that the whole Bible is inspired, and he thinks it shocking if people call our Lord Jesus Christ God; and yet he says he is a member of the Church of England. Then Mr. Pratt is a Protestant, and so are we, if I am to believe what I have always been taught; and yet Edgar and Eliza do nothing but abuse Protestantism, and won't be called anything but Catholics. It is dreadfully puzzling."

"But, at any rate, we all go to church together, and use the same beautiful Liturgy."

"Oh, yes. Going together to church is a great thing. I was thinking yesterday how nice it was to have Edgar with us again in the dear old pew, where he used to find for me the lessons when I was little. Don't you remember? Those first Christmas holidays he spent here? But I was sorry that he said as we came out that he hated those old pews."

"He has such good taste that anything ugly shocks his eyes; and you must own, dearest Annie, that those dear old pews, as you call them, disfigure a church."

"I don't care; I like the old green baize thing, and nobody shall talk me out of that liking."

"Not *even* Edgar?"

"No; not *even* Edgar," Annie answered, with a rather conscious smile. There was something in her countenance at that moment that made Mrs. Gerald think that the moment was perhaps come to give her niece a hint as to her own long-cherished desire. Since Edgar had been at Holmwood this time she had rejoiced to see how well the cousins were getting on together, and seemed to enjoy each other's society. Her disposition to believe whatever she wished led her to conclude that everything was progressing favourably towards the accomplishment of her hopes. She longed to speak to Annie on the subject. It was a dangerous experiment, but she could not resist the impulse. If

any one had seen her face and Annie's during the conversation that ensued, it would have been supposed that the aunt was more deeply interested in the matter than the niece. "Dearest love," she began, "you know I cannot help thinking a great deal about the future, and often wondering what your fate will be. There is nothing I care about as much as your happiness, and lately my thoughts have been running . . . ."

"On what, Aunt Gerald?" Annie quickly asked.

"Well, I have been wondering whether if Edgar was to fall in love with you . . . . there are more improbable things than that . . . . whether you would be inclined to like him . . . ."

"Like him!" Annie exclaimed. "Why, Aunt Gerald, don't you know that I have loved Edgar with all my heart since I was quite a baby? . . . ."

"Oh yes, my love; but what I mean is, whether you would like him in a different kind of manner . . . . Whether he is the sort of person you—would wish to marry?"

Annie blushed, but answered bluntly, "That is just what I have been thinking of myself."

"Have you indeed?" Mrs. Gerald exclaimed; "and what *do* you think?"

"When he was speaking yesterday after church of this place, and giving me advice about building cottages and making all sorts of improvements here, it occurred to me how very nice it would be for both of us if he should like to marry me. He said, with that eager look in his eyes which they have when anything interests him, 'Oh, Annie, what a position yours will be! What a field to work in: what talents God has placed in your hands! You will have a strict account to give of them; but I am sure you will do all you ought.' Now you know, Aunt Gerald, if he was my

husband he would help me to do everything that is right, and it would be easy to be good with one like him to teach me what to do."

"These are the very thoughts I have had, Annie darling, not for some hours or some days, but for a long time past. It would make me so happy."

"Well, and so it would me; but I do not expect it will happen. He is very fond of me and very kind to me; but I do not think I am the sort of girl he would like to marry. I am too stupid for him."

"My love, that is a great mistake. You are not at all stupid; on the contrary, you have a great deal of good sense and intelligence, but the merits of your understanding are of a different sort from his, and that is what gives you a sense of inferiority. This does not at all make it unlikely that he should admire and appreciate you; on the contrary, it is often the persons least similar in mind and character who get on best together. I have seen him look sometimes when he is talking to you as if he might be in danger of admiring you too much for his peace."

"I am sure he does not think of anything of the sort. He sometimes speaks of the time when I shall be married, and not at all in the way he would if he was thinking of himself."

"Well, you know he would not easily imagine that such a possibility existed."

"Why not?"

"Because, as the opinion of the world goes, it would be such a bad marriage for you. He has no fortune at all, and you are a rich heiress. This would make him, of course, very diffident. He would feel afraid that the attentions he might pay, and the attachment he might show to one whom it would be so very much his interest to marry, might be ascribed to worldly and selfish motives. Edgar is so generous and

high-minded that I am sure he would feel this very strongly."

"Would it be then like with the Queen and Prince Albert? Should I be obliged to say to him, 'My cousin, would you like to live always at Holmwood?'"

"No," Mrs. Gerald answered, laughing.

"You would not be obliged actually to propose to him. All I meant was, that in your relative positions a little more encouragement on your side would be needed than is generally the case. But mind, Annie darling, you must take time to consider whether he is really the person most likely to make you happy. It is fair to tell you that if I was to take you to London, and you went much into society, you would soon have ten offers of marriage rather than one."

"Because I am so rich, you mean. But I should not like any of these people; I should never care about any of them as I do for Edgar."

"You have not had opportunities of comparing him with other young men."

"I am sure I should not think anybody to be compared to him, and there is no one who would be so fond of Holmwood, or who would like so much to have it for his own, as he would."

Mrs. Gerald could not help smiling.

"As to liking to have Holmwood, I am not so sure. But I am quite ready to agree with you that no one would be worthier of possessing it and of marrying my Annie. And so you feel about your cousin as Miranda did about Prince Ferdinand! She had no ambition to see a goodlier man, and wished for no other companion, nor could she form in her imagination a shape to like of besides him. Is it even so, Annie?"

Annie laughed. "But for all that, Aunt Gerald, I do not think Edgar will ever be . . . ."

"At your feet, my Miranda. Well, we shall see."

There the conversation ended, and the rain that had kept for so many days the inhabitants of Holmwood imprisoned within doors, came also to an end. There was a bright red sunset that evening, and the next morning the sun was shining brightly.

CHAPTER III.

On the following morning, Annie rose in high good humour. Her conversation with her aunt had left an agreeable impression on her mind; and when she came downstairs, and went out from the breakfast-room on to the terrace where everything was fresh and lovely, the flowers smelling deliciously, and the distant views veiled by a transparent and most becoming haze, promising a fine day, she felt a pleasurable emotion in the thought that this home, this ancestral home of hers, as Mrs. Gerald liked to call it, was a gift in her possession, a gift she could bestow on any one she loved. Her heart swelled with some little self-complacency, and a shade of that feeling might have been detected in her manner as she walked into the house and took her place at the breakfast table.

The post arrived at Holmwood early in the morning, so that Edgar had read his letters before leaving his room. When he came down, Annie said to him, "The sun, you see, has come out as I predicted last night; but the worst of it is that I am sure Aunt Gerald will insist on our going to Marchbanks to-day."

"I do not see, Annie, how we can put it off any longer," Mrs. Gerald observed; "and you must come with us, Edgar, you have not called yet on Mr. Hendon."

"I am so sorry," Edgar answered, "but I am obliged to go away to-day."

"To-day!"

"Yes; I have received letters which oblige me to go to London."

"On business?" Mrs. Gerald asked with a heightened colour, "Will it detain you long?"

"I cannot tell. It is quite uncertain."

"Nothing unpleasant has happened, I hope?"

"Nothing that concerns me personally, or any of our friends," he replied.

Annie was looking grave. She was very much disappointed, and not at all used to disappointment. She had been gradually discovering that she not only loved Edgar very much as she had always done, but that since he had been this time at Holmwood a new feeling towards him had been springing up in her heart, like what she had often read of, not exactly in novels, for few of them had been put in her hands (and indeed of her own accord and for her own pleasure she seldom opened a book), but in tales and poems she had read with Miss Rose. It was, she thought, or would be some day like what Amy in the *Heir of Redclyffe* felt for Guy, or Evangeline for Gabriel the son of the blacksmith. These descriptions had made little impression upon her at the time, but now they helped her to see that she was really likely to love Edgar, provided he also loved her in the way Mrs. Gerald meant. Almost all night she had been awake thinking over the new ideas suggested by what her aunt had said, and considering what was the sort of encouragement she ought to give to a cousin who was not rich, but whom she should like very much to marry if he should wish it himself.

Annie had never thought much for a girl of her age, and this had been almost the first occasion on which she had exercised her reflective powers on a subject of importance. On the whole those sleepless hours had

been happy ones, and the conclusion she had come to satisfactory. It was, therefore, with difficulty that she restrained tears of vexation, not only at Edgar's going away so suddenly, but at the suspense and uncertainty in which this departure had left her. Annie was not romantic or sentimental, but her feelings were strong, and they were at that moment wounded. She hardly spoke during breakfast, and answered very shortly the questions addressed to her. As soon as the meal was over, Mrs. Gerald drew Edgar aside, and tried to extract from him the reason of his departure, but she did not succeed. He would only repeat that he was obliged to go to London, and could not tell for how long. When his fly drove up to the door, he went to shake hands with Annie, who said, "You know, of course, that we shall be very glad to see you whenever you can come back, but I do not expect you will care to do so."

"You would not say that," he answered, "if you knew how happy it has made me to be here. There were many things I wished to say to you . . . . and as it is possible . . . ." (there was a little emotion in his voice which made Annie look at him with surprise), "as one never knows what may happen," he continued, "I thought I would just say this much. Do, dear Annie, think over some of the things we have talked about, and read the books I have left with you."

"I should like very much to be as good as you are," Annie answered, in a softened manner.

"Do not talk of my being good, dear Annie; but pray that you may be led into all truth."

"Led into truth!" she said to herself, as he drove away. "But who is to lead me? I suppose he means God, as I am to pray for it. But God seems to lead him one way and Mr. Pratt another; for I am sure they both wish to know the truth, and to do what is

right—they both pray a great deal. Oh, dear me! What is the use of my reading about the Apostolical Succession, and the power of the keys—I cannot make out who is right, and who is wrong."

In this desponding mood she sat down to her work, having, somewhat crossly, refused to play a duet with Jane Conway. Mrs. Gerald was also very much annoyed. It had crossed her mind that Miss Rose had perhaps given a hint to Edgar's mother as to her wish that he should marry Annie, and that Mrs. Langdon (Mrs. Herbert Derwent had married again) might possibly have written to him on the subject. If so, his abrupt departure was perhaps in consequence of that letter. Perhaps he was attached, possibly engaged to some one else! And she had been putting her own foolish ideas into Annie's head! She would have given anything to unsay what she had said! When a plan is likely to fail, people are apt to get unreasonably angry with themselves for having made it; that is, if they cannot find any excuse for being angry with anybody else. Mrs. Gerald did, indeed, begin inwardly blaming Miss Rose for having so quickly acted on her suggestion, taking no time to think—it was so like her. There were two ways of doing things—she had no tact, no judgment. "Then why did you employ her in so delicate a matter?" retorted conscience, or something between conscience and temper—and the inward voice had the best of it. We generally test the merit of our actions by their results; and there are few persons good enough to feel as the holy Curé d'Ars did, and said when he had lighted his candle with a bank-note, that the greatest mistake is not half so bad as the smallest possible sin. Mrs. Gerald was in a state of conditional anger with herself, Edgar, Miss Rose, and Mrs. Langdon. *If* what she feared was true, she could not forgive herself or any of them.

After luncheon, the newspapers arrived by the second post. Miss Conway was reading the "Times," whilst the rest of the party wrote their letters. She suddenly looked up, and said to Jane—

"Now I am sure I know why Mr. Derwent has gone to London."

Mrs. Gerald instantly asked what she meant, and then Eliza felt sorry she had made the remark. Even sensible people sometimes speak without thinking; but there was no help for it, and so she answered—

"I see the cholera has broken out very badly in the Borough, and particularly in the district where I know he visits the poor."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Gerald, "I hope he will not go there now."

Eliza made no answer.

Annie said, "I am certain he will. He was talking last night about the poor, and the sort of feeling people ought to have about them; and this is just the kind of thing he would do."

Mrs. Gerald felt in one respect greatly relieved and pleased also with Annie's manner of speaking about her cousin; though anxious about his being exposed to the danger of catching the cholera, she was less distressed and better satisfied with herself than a moment ago. So she listened complacently to Eliza's next remark.

"You can have no idea how much good he has been doing in London ever since his return from abroad; he has set before his eyes the example of the saints in all ages, and his continual object is to imitate their charity, and help to rekindle the same spirit in our Church. There is not one of our Anglican Sisterhoods or Houses of Charity that he does not in some way or other assist. Sometimes he sits up all night himself with sick people."

"How strange!" Annie said.

"Strange in one sense certainly, because so few persons act in that way. But is it not *most* strange that, considering what our Lord has said, there should be Christians who do nothing at all for the poor?"

"Oh, yes; of course people ought to be charitable."

"In the account of the day of Judgment, are not works of charity made the criterion of a man's prospect of salvation?"

"Yes; I have often thought that chapter a very uncomfortable one. Lizzie, do you think Edgar would like me to give him some money for those poor sick people he goes to see?"

Eliza's face brightened. "Yes, I am sure he would," she answered. "People who do not see or hear much of the poor, little know what a suffering it is to be constantly witnessing misery without the power of relieving it—to feel how much could be done with a little money, and not to have it to give, whilst it is squandered in every direction, and lavished on dress and every luxury. If your cousin is, as I am fully persuaded he is, visiting the cholera patients, often and often he must meet with persons who would die with resignation if they knew their orphan children would be provided for. He finds, no doubt, cases of terrible misery wherever he goes."

Annie went up to Mrs. Gerald, and said, "Aunt Gerald, will you immediately send for me to Edgar fifty pounds."

"Yes, my love; but you must write to him yourself, and I will enclose a cheque for you."

Annie sat down, and wrote with a full heart:—

"Dear Edgar,—I wish more than ever that I could be as good as you, though I am afraid if I think ever so much over the things you said to me about

being High Church, that I shall not understand them. I send you some money for the poor people Eliza says you go and see in London.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ANNIE."

"You must let me help you, Lizzie, with your poor people when you go back to London," she whispered to her friend.

"Thank you, dear," Eliza answered.

"And now, darling," said Mrs. Gerald, when she had sealed the letter to Edgar, "do put on your things. We must drive to Marchbanks; we really cannot put it off any longer. They arrived, you know, three weeks ago, and Lady Emily wrote to me four days ago that she felt now quite well enough to see me."

"Very well," Annie said, with a look of resignation. "If you all knew how I hate making new acquaintances, you would pity me. What is Miss Flower's Christian name, Aunt Gerald?"

"I don't know, my love. Now, do get ready."

At last they started. During the whole drive Annie was thoughtful, and spoke very little. She was not shy, but she had a sort of *sauvagerie* as the French call it, which made her dislike to meet strangers. But besides this, her aunt's thoughts and her own were much engrossed by the conversation about Edgar which had just taken place, and the idea of the danger he was running in visiting the cholera patients in an infected district. Mrs. Gerald mused on this subject with the nervous apprehension of one who had known many losses and sorrows. Annie dwelt upon it with comparatively little fear. Young persons untried by grief do not realize danger; or, if they do, it is with a kind of excitement which hides from them the amount of suffering involved in it. Still, whilst picturing to

herself her cousin in a sick-room kneeling by the side of a dying person, she thought of death more seriously than she had ever done before. She had never communed much with herself, but had taken life day by day, as it came before her, with all its little pleasures, vexations, and anticipations. Death seemed immeasurably far off, and Heaven something more distant and unreal still. Perhaps she had with regard to it a little of the feeling of the farmer, who said with a deep sigh to a fellow traveller who happened to speak of it, "Ah, well, I suppose we must all come to that at last." It was a matter of course she should go to heaven some day, but luckily not for a long time to come. But now the appearance of the cholera in London, and Edgar actually exposing himself to the risk of catching it, seemed to change a little the position of things. It really made her think that people did die, young as well as old people ; but she did not communicate any of her thoughts to her aunt, only as they turned into Marchbanks Park she asked her if she had put her letter to Edgar into the letter-box. When satisfied on this point, she said, "Marchbanks is not nearly so pretty a place as Holmwood."

"Is that a new discovery you have made?" Mrs. Gerald answered.

"It never struck me so much before."

"I think Edgar has taught you to appreciate Holmwood."

Annie smiled. And now that Mrs. Gerald was relieved from the fear that her nephew's departure had been the result of the message she had wished conveyed to him, all her self-reproach vanished, Miss Rose was acquitted, and she began again to pursue her favourite object with the same ardour as before.

Lady Emily Hendon was at home, and Mrs. Gerald and Annie were shown into the drawing-room, which

looked more habitable and cheerful than when its use was confined to the days on which Mr. Hendon gave dinner parties. An invalid couch, books besides those in the book-case, flowers on all the tables, and two little dogs in two separate arm-chairs, were new features in the room, which was now exclusively occupied in the morning by Lady Emily. Twenty-three years had elapsed since she and Mrs. Gerald had met, and both seemed affected with the sense of the changes that had occurred since they had last seen each other in that house. They sat a moment without speaking, a silent pressure of their hands expressing what was passing through their minds. Mrs. Gerald then said, "This is my niece, Annie Derwent."

Lady Emily shook hands with her, and exclaimed, "I am so sorry Ita is not at home."

Though Annie had disliked the idea of a new acquaintance, she was perverse enough to feel disappointed that she should not after all see Miss Flower.

"If you go into the garden, my love, perhaps you will meet her," Lady Emily added.

Annie did not quite like to be told like a little girl to go into the garden, or to be called "my love" by somebody she hardly knew. But on the whole, as it was pleasanter to stroll out of doors even if Miss Flower was not to be seen, than to sit with the two friends, feeling herself in the way, she took the hint, walked out into the shrubbery, and went to a bench where a shawl and a book indicated that somebody had been sitting. She looked at the title-page of the volume, and saw that it was a French translation of Fabiola. A little picture of the sort that Catholics keep in their Prayer-books fell at her feet; this one represented a heart with a sword running through it. Annie hastily replaced it between the leaves, with a feeling which was almost like one of fear and disgust;

she saw it was something religious, and most minds recoil from what is new and strange to them on that subject. She had hardly done so when she saw a small figure hastening towards her, whom she, of course, knew must be the young lady of the house—the little Miss Flower she was to make acquaintance with. "It is rather a bore without any one to introduce me," she thought; however, starting up, she advanced a few steps towards the breathless girl, who had been running to meet her. They both smiled and shook hands. "You are Miss Derwent, I suppose?"

"Yes, and you, Miss Flower?"

"I am Ita; nobody calls me anything else. Will you sit here, or come back into the house?"

"Just as you like. It's just the same to me."

"We can, if you please, stay out till the clock strikes five, and then go in to tea. Mamma must be very glad to see Mrs. Gerald. She is such an old friend of hers."

Annie took at once a fancy to her new acquaintance. A most engaging little being Mr. Hendon had said she was four or five years before, and Annie thought she certainly continued to be so now. What was she like? When the Conways put that question to Annie on her return home, she said, "I am sure I cannot tell; she is nice all over." And this was perhaps the best description she could give of Ita. She had the sweetest, prettiest, dearest face imaginable—perfectly brown eyes, shaded with dark black curling eyelashes, a little round nose with no particular shape at all, the loveliest small mouth, with a charming smile that rippled over her face, dimpled and soft as a child's. Her hair was of a colour that matched perfectly with her eyes. Her whole figure, her hands, her feet, were exactly of the size that suited her face. There was not anything about her that was not pretty, though nothing perhaps

was beautiful. Her voice and her laugh had a pleasant sound in them which made one think of the low twitter of birds in hedges. Three French words, were applicable to her: she was *mignonne*, *spirituelle*, *caressante*, and yet she was not like a Frenchwoman. "Lovely" is perhaps the English word which would best describe little Ita. As soon as Annie saw her she had a singular feeling that her face was somehow familiar to her; though, at the same time, she could not remember having ever set eyes on one so engaging. Almost for the first time in her life she felt a wish to make herself agreeable.

"I am so glad to know you," Ita said. "Mr. Hendon promised me I should, and I have been looking forward to it so much."

"We should have called last week, but the rain prevented us."

"And mamma is scarcely ever well enough to drive out."

"Is this the first time you have been in England?"

"Yes! I have lived all my life abroad."

"Where?"

"Almost always at Mentone."

"Where is that—in Italy?"

"No, not exactly. We say we are not Italian, French, or Piedmontese. We are Mentonese?"

"*We*," said Annie, smiling. "Are *you* Mentonese?"

"I cannot tell what I am," Ita answered, blushing a little. "I know I love Mentone as if it was my native place."

"Oh, I am sorry for that; I am such a thorough Englishwoman."

"In time, I dare say I shall grow fond of England. I can fancy that the country about here may be very pretty."

"Can't you *see* it is?" Annie answered, in an offended tone of voice.

"It has rained a great deal, you know, since I have been here," Ita rejoined, with one of her pretty smiles.

"And does it never rain at Mentone?"

"Oh yes; it pours sometimes for days together, and everybody is so glad. But when once the rainy season is over, the sun shines for weeks, and sometimes for months, without ceasing."

"I hope you will soon come to Holmwood."

"Is that the name of the place where you live in?"

"It is my own place."

"Your own, because you love it?"

"No, because it belongs to me, and I shall like to show it you. Everybody thinks it pretty."

"Thank you, I should like very much to see it. You are so kind to me, I feel already as if I was not speaking to a stranger."

"It is very odd you should say so. I cannot get it out of my head that I have seen your face somewhere before. Are you only just come to England? I thought we might, perhaps, have come across each other in London."

"Oh no; I never was there except for a few days."

"Are you going to stay here long?"

"I do not know. It will depend on mamma's health; she is very delicate."

"Did you always stay at Mentone?"

"In the summer we generally went to the Italian lakes or to Switzerland."

"How much you have travelled!"

"Not very much, I think. I should like to go to Rome and Jerusalem."

"I have never been abroad since I was quite a little child. I can just remember Nice, and a garden with orange-trees I used to play in."

"Mentone is close to Nice, and it has beautiful orange-trees and such lovely olive woods. I wish I could show you Mentone—its dark blue sea and its lovely mountains. It is my own dear place, not because it belongs to me," this Ita said smiling, "but because I love it so much; I would rather live there than anywhere in the world—everything is so pretty—the sky, the sea, the flowers, and the people's faces."

"Have they dark eyes and brown skins like the Italian boys we see in London?"

"No, they are not very dark. Some of the women have blue eyes like yours, and black hair. You are very like some of the Mentonese girls."

"I hope as you are so fond of them that it will make you fond of me."

This was a sort of speech Annie had never made to any one before. She was quite surprised at herself, and still more so when in return Ita kissed her. It was done so gently and simply, just as a child gives a kiss instead of saying "Thank you," that she was touched and pleased. The clock struck five, and the two girls went into the drawing-room. Ita was introduced to Mrs. Gerald, and brought her a cup of tea. When she gave it into her hands, and said something about the pleasure it was to have made acquaintance with Annie, there was a charm in her manner that immediately struck Mrs. Gerald. Whenever she saw for the first time a young person of Annie's age, her first impulse was to compare them. During all the rest of the visit she seemed unable to take her eyes off Miss Flower. Perhaps she thought that her sort of beauty was so different from her niece's that nobody but herself would think of comparing them, or else that her manner possessed exactly the sort of charm which was wanting in Annie's; for intense as was her worship of her niece, she was keenly sensible of

certain deficiencies in that idolized being. She was so absorbed in watching the two girls that it made her quite absent; Lady Emily's languid remarks were scarcely attended to. It would have been difficult to say if it was with jealous or admiring eyes that Mrs. Gerald noticed Ita's winning, feminine, graceful movements—the way in which she unconsciously sat or stood in the attitude which an artist would have appreciated, her pretty manner of speaking to Lady Emily, even the engaging playfulness with which she coaxed the two little spaniels that jumped on her knees, as if they were as fond of her as Mrs. Gerald felt everybody was likely to be.

"Ita, have you and Miss Derwent been taking a walk?" Lady Emily asked.

"No, mamma, we have been making friends," was the answer; and the smile with which this was said contrasted with Annie's stiff silence. Not but that her smile was sometimes very beautiful also; it came and went like a sudden flash of light, and was very different from the dimpling sweetness of Ita's laugh. Whatever was the reason of Mrs. Gerald's absence of mind, it was so remarkable that Annie, very unobservant of such things in general, could not help noticing it.

As they were driving home, Annie said, "Don't you think Miss Flower very pretty? Why, I wonder, is she called Ita? Do you suppose it is short for anything?"

"I do not know, dear love."

"She does not call Lady Emily mamma, but *mamma* in the Italian way."

"Does she?"

"How long as she lived with Lady Emily?"

"I do not know. Mr. Hendon, writing from the Baths of Acqui about fourteen or fifteen years ago,

said his sister-in-law was there, and had brought with her a pretty little creature, who could speak nothing but a kind of *patois*."

"I am sure I have seen somebody like her before, though I cannot remember where. I don't mind how much we see of her now. I never took so great a fancy to any one."

"In the evening, Annie gave the Miss Conways an account of her visit, and of the minutest circumstances connected with it, not forgetting the French Fabiola and the strange little picture within its leaves.

"If this Miss Ita is an admirer of Fabiola," Eliza said, "we should sympathize on one point at least."

"I hope she is not a Roman Catholic," Jane exclaimed, who in most points, and about religion particularly, liked to show her independence, by strenuously opposing her cleverer sister's opinions.

"Oh, I hope not," Annie cried; and, as Eliza did not speak, she insisted, as she was fond of doing, on making her give an answer. "Don't you hope, Eliza, she is not a Catholic?"

"I wish you would say a Roman Catholic."

"Oh well, a Roman Catholic, if you like; it all comes to the same."

"That is just your mistake; it makes all the difference. I wish everybody was Catholic . . . ."

"And nobody Roman Catholic?" interrupted Annie.

"No, I do not exactly mean that; and I was going to say about this young lady, that I could hardly express a wish on the subject, unless I knew to what country she belongs. . . . ."

"She is English of course. She is called Miss Flower. Ita must be her pet name."

"Well, even granting that she *is* English, if she has always lived abroad, and never had an opportunity, which is often the case, of knowing what are the true

principles of the Church of England, it is, I think, questionable whether it would not be better for her to have been brought up a Roman Catholic than in the heretical Protestant ideas unfortunately prevalent amongst so many members of our branch of the Catholic Church."

"Well, I did not expect," Jane replied, "that you would go so far as that—that you would wish anybody to worship a wafer and adore the Virgin Mary."

"Oh, Jane, you cannot know what pain you give me," Eliza exclaimed, an indignant blush rising to her cheeks, and her voice trembling with emotion. "It is these ignorant and unjust accusations against the Church of Rome, which drive so many persons out of our purer Church into her communion, which in this country is schismatical. Roman Catholics may disfigure the truth sometimes by abuses and excesses, but they are right in all essential points of docrine; they adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and a belief in the Real Presence has always been maintained by our Church."

"Mr. Pratt does not think so," Annie retorted. "Do you know what the Church teaches better than a clergyman?"

"Well, Annie, I do not wish to say anything presumptuous, or anything that would give you pain—but I have been taught by those who have gone deeply into the question, men of great learning and ability, and very holy men too, that the true doctrines of the Church of England have been fearfully misunderstood and misrepresented by men of Mr. Pratt's age, who lived at a time when heretical principles prevailed almost universally in our Church. . . . ."

"I am sure Mr. Pratt would never misrepresent anything," Annie indignantly exclaimed; "and I believe he is just as good a man as any of those you speak of."

"I am sure he is a good man," Eliza said, with an earnestness that brought tears into her eyes. "I only think he is deceived on some points. The ideas I mean quite took possession of the Anglican Church at one time, like Arianism and the Donatist heresy invaded the Catholic Church in former times, so that at one moment hardly any bishop held by the truth except St. Athanasius."

Now, Eliza had it all her own way. She had gone far beyond the depth of her companions. Annie could only say, "I wish Mr. Pratt was here to argue with you," and Jane fell foul of St. Athanasius; "I should not at all have liked to be on his side, for I think his creed is very uncharitable. When mamma," she said, "was well enough to go out, she would never go to church when it was read."

"Mr. Pratt never reads it," Annie said.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Eliza.

There was a silence—Jane folded up her work and went away. Annie was occupied with her drawing and looking grave.

"I am afraid, dearest Annie," Eliza said, "that you are more disposed to agree with Jane than with me on these subjects."

"I don't know. I don't want to side with any one. Since you and Edgar have talked to me about these things, I am puzzled what to think. You take these Church principles so much to heart, and you are both so good . . . ."

"Oh no, he is good, but I am not."

"Now don't make me angry, Eliza, by saying what you really can't think. Look at Jane, look at me—you must see that we are neither of us one half as good as you are."

"Perhaps I do more useful things, and see more plainly than you do truths which, when once admitted,

oblige us to act up to them. But then nobody but God knows how much or how little we each of us correspond to the amount of grace He gives us, or how far what looks like goodness may be the result of natural tastes and inclinations. It is only when we die that we shall know what we really are."

Annie laid down her pencil and exclaimed, "Yes, that is just what I mean, what I was going to say. There is, I am sure, something in your religion which goes deeper and takes a greater hold of you than is generally the case with people, as far as I can see."

"I think I can tell you, Annie, what that something is."

"What?"

"Catholic teaching—the teaching of Christ's Church."

"But what Church do you mean?"

"The Catholic Church wherever it exists—the great tree whose branches extend all over the world. Each little leaf growing on that tree draws its spiritual life from the particular branch to which its baptism has attached it. To us the English Church is that branch—for a long and dreary time it has been languishing, and disfigured by ugly excrescences; but now the sap is beginning again to flow, and the true Catholic spirit to revive amongst us. The duty of every one of her children in this country is to help on that revival by promoting, as much as possible, the spread of Catholic doctrines and practices."

"But I thought you said it was the teaching of the Church that made people good."

"So I did."

"But now you say it is her children that are to make *her* good—that they are to help her to teach what is true. But then, how are we to know what *is* true?"

"The creeds, the Prayer-book, the general consent of antiquity testify to Catholic truth."

"Mr. Pratt says not."

Eliza felt a sensation which, in a less good and less well-educated person might have betrayed itself, perhaps by some exclamation such as "Hang Mr. Pratt!" but she only coloured a little, and answered: "If you choose to pin your faith upon what one particular person says, it is useless to argue."

"How many persons do you build yours upon?"

"No particular number. I receive the teaching of the Catholic Church."

"But who tells you what its teaching is?"

"Those who have deeply studied it."

"But there are other people, I suppose, who have deeply studied it too, and don't agree with them. You told me the other day that the Roman Catholics had added a lot of new things to the teaching of the Church. How do you know that they are wrong, and those who say so right?"

"The persons who tell me so are my own appointed teachers."

"Well, Mr. Pratt is *my* appointed teacher—I don't see why I'm not to believe him."

The clock struck seven, the dressing bell rang, and the argument ended—fortunately, perhaps, for the cleverest of the two disputants.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days later on Annie received the following letter from her cousin :—

"DEAREST ANNIE,—I was so busy last week that I could only briefly acknowledge the receipt of your kind note and the cheque enclosed in it. I must write now more at length: in the first instance, to thank you from my heart for that welcome gift, which has enabled me to relieve much suffering, and afford many comforts to the sick and dying. What pleased me most was that you should have thought of doing this unasked. It was far, far better than if I had made the request, and you had, however good-naturedly, complied with it. We feel alike, I am sure, on many points, and I do not despair of bringing you one day to think as I do with respect to those principles which are the ruling ones of my life, and have opened as it were a new world to me. From the time I began to know anything about religion up to the age of twenty, I lived quite unconscious of the spiritual treasures which the Church of England has it in her power to bestow upon her children ; I did not in the least realize its relation to my soul or my duties towards her : the whole of her sacramental system was a dead letter to me. Baptism seemed no more than the ceremony of admission into the Christian body; the word *Church* conveyed to me no other idea than that of a society which met together for public worship once a week—

of the supernatural effects of baptism on the soul I never dreamed. In the same way the power of the keys, the commission by God of an absolving power to man, was perfectly unknown to me as existing in our Church, and, yet more, that Divine and awful gift, the Holy Eucharist, which Alexander Knox, the parent of the great Catholic revival in this country, discerned and described as the *sine qua non* of a true Christian faith; justly observing that if we did not possess Christ's real presence amongst us, we were less favoured than the Jews of old, who in the cloud and in the ark did enjoy an actual real presence of God, leading them through the desert, and abiding with them in the promised land; that sacred mystery appeared to me only in the light of a mere commemoration, a devout ceremony, but not the real dwelling of an Incarnate God on our altars and in our hearts. It was at Oxford that I began to hear of Catholic principles in our Church, and to associate with those whose belief and whose lives were influenced by them. I soon felt that this was the creed I was in need of. Once or twice in my boyhood books had fallen into my hands which had caused the thought to pass through my mind that Roman Catholics had helps in their religion which we did not possess in ours. I had coveted these helps, and mentally exclaimed, like Dr. Newman, before his apostasy, 'O that thy creed were sound, thou Church of Rome.'

"The world was beginning to display to me its attractions; temptations met me at every turn; I wanted not merely to be warned in a general way against its dangers, but to be armed against them; I felt the need of a stimulus to enter the narrow path, of a helping hand to guide and support me along it; above all I wanted a Divine love to put in the place of that of self—a love which would be as fervent as a

human love, and the object of which should be within reach of my soul. I yearned for that nearness to God which Roman Catholics seemed to me to enjoy, though I recoiled with intense dislike from some of their doctrines and practices, and had then an instinctive feeling, as I now have a settled conviction, that I could never join their communion. Judge then with what rapture I hailed the new ideas about the English Church, which were then presented to me. I remember exclaiming, with intense joy, after reading some of the High Church publications of the day, 'This is beyond my hopes; this is what I have longed for without knowing that it existed—Catholicism without Popery; a new religion, but one which does not oblige me to forsake the churches I have prayed in since my childhood, to part company with my mother and my friends, or to separate myself from our thoroughly English National Church, and yet which offers everything I have been tempted to covet in Romanism, and opens to me the accumulated treasures of the universal Church, purified from the dross which human infirmity has attached to them.'

"These anticipations have been fulfilled. I travelled abroad after leaving Oxford; I have lived and worked in London since my return. Whilst on the Continent, I found I could enjoy much in the devotions and services of the Roman Catholic Church, even while I clung with increasing earnestness to that purer Church which is reviving in our own land. The writings of the Fathers and the lives of saints inspired me with an ever-increasing love for Catholicism, and detestation of the Protestant heresy, which has so long disfigured and blighted our Anglican faith. When I returned to London I found, to my great delight, that, in several of our churches, Catholic doctrines were openly taught, Catholic devotions revived, the daily service adopted

even where the true faith had not yet made decided progress, and the Eucharistic sacrifice offered up with a distinct recognition of its propitiatory character. Religious houses were opened also, and persons were consecrating themselves by vow to the service of God and the poor. I cannot tell you with what ardour I entered into this movement; how I felt I had something real to live for, that the Church of England was the true home of my soul, and my one object in life to assist in the development of her true character. But this object is not one of easy attainment; a faltering heart, an uncertain aim, will not advance it. We must be prepared to pursue it in the midst of darkness, gloom, reproach, and discouragement. Our loyalty to the Church of our baptism must be staunch, unflinching, persevering; no disheartening difficulties within must shake our faith in our spiritual Mother, no seductions from without must allure us from her bosom. Like the youth in Longfellow's poem, who bore through snow and ice the banner with that strange device, 'Excelsior,' we must endure to pass through a frozen region on our way to the summit we shall one day reach. Our Church has been shorn of its beauty, of its riches—I speak, of course, of spiritual riches—but it is pure; it has kept clear of the superstitions and errors which have so fatally beset the Church of Rome, and on that point our filial feelings may justly exult. Yes, we must be true to the Church of England: many false, weak, deluded persons have abandoned her, exchanging an arduous struggle and a lofty aim for a faithless ease—a noble strife for the self-gratification of a wayward impatience. But I, Annie, will never forsake the English Catholic Church. I have nailed my colours to her mast: I have blended, in one intense feeling, my devotion to her and my passionate love of my own country. In our cathedrals

and colleges, and above all in our beautiful parish churches, I see the pledges of her future restoration to Catholic truth and beauty, and often find myself addressing to England, dear England, the words of Ruth, 'My people shall be thy people, thy God my God.'

"What a grave letter, dear Annie! But the truth is that I have, since I left you, seen several persons on the brink of eternity. I have seen peaceful deathbeds and dreadful ones, and 'cela donne à penser,' as French people say. I met Miss Rose yesterday at my mother's, and had a long talk with her about dear Holmwood. Do write again and tell me what you think of all I have been telling you. Till the cholera disappears, I cannot bring myself to leave these poor people. Pray that I may be able to prove of real use to some of them.—Your affectionate Cousin,

"EDGAR DERWENT."

"P.S.—Dear Annie, I cannot close this letter without telling you of a thought which has been pressing more and more on my mind since I have had an opportunity of judging of the great want there is of clergymen devoted to our Church, and anxious to instil her true principles into our people. I think I might do much more good as a clergyman than in any other way, and have almost made up my mind to take holy orders. I did not mean to have mentioned this to you at present; but, on the whole, I prefer doing so, and should very much wish to know your opinion on the subject."

Annie was very much perplexed—the postscript especially "lui donnait a penser," though not in so serious a sense as the death-bed scenes Edgar had been so impressed with. The idea of his becoming a clergyman was not at first agreeable to her; it did not seem

natural, and she had a feeling that it would not be quite proper that the mistress of Holmwood should be a clergyman's wife. The two ideas did not go together. There was, however, no real reason against it, and, on second thoughts, she did not see why Edgar should not be a clergyman if he wished it, or why it should be an obstacle to their marriage, should such a thing ever be in question; on the contrary, among those she had lived with it was generally assumed that a wife was almost a necessary condition of usefulness for a clergyman, and, though there had been a time when she would have disliked the idea of that kind of life, it did not now seem unattractive to her. Edgar's last visit had changed her way of thinking in many respects. And then she recollected that in the course of a few years it must of necessity happen that dear old Mr. Pratt should die, and the living of Holmwood would be, her aunt had told her, in her gift. She would then, of course, give it to Edgar whether he was her husband or not; if he was her husband then, they could make Holmwood a perfect paradise for themselves and the poor.

Annie had made some progress during the last few weeks. A little while before she would have planned a Garden of Eden for herself, and, at most, two or three other individuals; but now, thanks to her cousin and Eliza Conway, she included in her castle in the air, alms-houses and schools, and, perhaps, a little hospital and a nurse, such as they had told her some friends of hers had established in a village near their home. Then she went on to think (Annie had never thought so much in her life before) that she should like to hear Edgar preach. When he talked about religion, and all he hoped and wished on that subject, she had often felt that it was very interesting to listen to him, and she could fancy that his sermons would be very

beautiful. If he was one day the master of Holmwood and its vicar also, he would be able to make all the improvements he liked in the church. People would admire him very much, they would say it was very good in a man who had married a rich heiress, to give up the world and live in retirement at Holmwood, devoting himself to his parishioners. The postcript of Edgar's letter had made her entirely overlook all that preceded it.

There is a strange indifference about doctrines amongst Protestants. As long as they can walk to the same church with their friends and relatives, that is to the same visible building, kneel down side by side and use the same form of prayers, they often seem not to care the least if their opinions are as wide as the poles asunder. One may believe that when the clergyman utters certain words our Lord really descends on the altar, and another that this is a gross superstition, a miserable idolatry; and yet as long as the outward semblance of unity exists, nothing more is said than that so and so is very extreme in his opinions, or that so and so is very much against Puseyism. If the family is an affectionate and good-humoured one, these remarks are made in rather a playful manner with an amused smile. Yet one would have supposed that it was a matter of deep and vital importance whether a stupendous miracle was continually taking place amongst us unacknowledged, denied, and neglected, or, on the other hand, adoration paid to a piece of mere bread.

It was that vague habit of mind, which results from the uncertain teaching of a Church that has no undoubted or undisputed tenets of its own, that made Annie so perfectfy satisfied with the prospect of marrying one whose opinions were as opposed as possible to those in which she had been educated, and who differed

from her old instructor on almost every point. It did not even occur to her that it would be wrong or a hardship on any one to transfer the spiritual charge of a congregation, which for nearly fifty years had been taught by Mr. Pratt to believe what he and she herself believed to be true, to the care of one who would teach them exactly the reverse.

This strange toleration of every kind of opinions, so that it is within the limits of the Anglican Establishment, is no doubt an advantage in the eyes of those who think that women have no right outwardly to differ from their husbands in matters which concern their souls. The rights of parents, uncles, aunts, elder brothers, and sisters on this point are considered to vary according to circumstances; but, the husband's right being generally regarded as indisputable, it would be well, perhaps, now that there are two different religions in the English Establishment, to adopt the plan formerly followed in the Royal Protestant families abroad, and not, as has been seen by some recent examples, yet exploded—that is, of educating girls in no particular religion in order that they may be ready to adopt when they marry, the one which is professed by their husbands. Indeed among foreign Protestants, not of royal birth, this system is apparently acknowledged. Some years ago, a German young lady wrote to a friend to announce her marriage; after describing the merits of her future husband's character and position, she ended her letter as follows: "There is only one thing I regret. You know how long I have wished to be a Catholic, and I had always hoped, when I married, to have been able to follow my inclination. But it unfortunately happens that Mr.—— is a Protestant; I must therefore submit to the will of God, and resign myself to continue one also."

In the afternoon of the day on which she had re-

ceived Edgar's letter, Annie asked Eliza to take a walk with her, and contrrived to lead the conversation to the subject of clergymen marrying. She remembered that her friend had expressed, one day, an opinion rather unfavourable to their doing so. She had taken no heed of it at the time, but now felt anxious to revert to it. Eliza seemed averse to commit herself at first on that point. She said she did not think it was always desirable, but celibacy should never be compulsory as in the Church of Rome. Is it not curious how young ladies will sometimes pronounce on points which it has taken the experience of ages, and the deliberations of councils under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to decide?

"But then you think," said Annie, "that High Church people consider it most perfect not to marry?"

"As a general rule, but not in all cases," Eliza answered; "in the Greek Church priests marry, but, if their wives die, they cannot marry again, and no married man can be a bishop."

"And Roman Catholic priests never marry at all?"

"No, never—that universal prohibition is one of the abuses of the Church of Rome."

"In that case," Annie thought, "it will be a good thing for me to marry Edgar if he becomes a clergyman, because it will prevent him from ever becoming a Roman Catholic."

He had asked her to answer his letter—to tell him what she thought of all he had said. This was very difficult, because really about a great deal of it she had no thoughts at all, or at any rate, she did not know how to put what she did think into words. But this might be a good opportunity, perhaps, of giving him the sort of encouragement Mrs. Gerald had spoken of, and so she sat down and wrote this short letter:—

"DEAR EDGAR,—All you say about the Church and your attachment to it, and the help it is to you, is very interesting. I suppose that about some things men and women do not feel quite alike. It would be so much pleasanter, and easier I think, and better for us, too, if we could be sure who is right and who is wrong. You are much more likely to be right than I am; but then I do not see why Mr. Pratt is not likely to know about these sort of things as well as you and your friends. If you both told me the same thing there would be no difficulty, it is the difference that puzzles me; you can't both be right. Sometimes I think that, perhaps, it does not much signify what people believe if they are good; but when I say that, Eliza tells me I am quite wrong, that there are very good Jews and Mohammedans, and yet that it must signify very much to be a Christian or not, to be baptized or not baptized; and then I really do not know what to say. If you become a clergyman, and especially if one day you should happen to be our clergyman here, perhaps you would in time persuade me to think as you do. It must be a very serious thing to become a clergyman, and I suppose you will reflect a great deal before you decide. If you make up your mind to it I shall not be sorry. Aunt Gerald is writing to you; at first she did not seem pleased, but I think she is coming round to it. I wish you could come back to Holmwood, I shall get less fond of it again if you stay away a long time. I have seen Miss Flower, Lady Emily's adopted daughter, she seems a very nice girl.

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"ANNIE DERWENT."

A few days after this letter was sent the Miss Conways left Holmwood to join their parents by the sea-side. They spent one day in London on their way

to Worthing. Mrs. Langdon, Edgar's mother, called on them in the morning, and asked them to dine with her and her husband that evening. She said they would be quite alone, but that Edgar would come in after dinner, and that he would be so glad to see them. Jane had arranged to go to the play that evening with one of her brothers, but Eliza was delighted to accept the invitation, and to have an opportunity of talking over with Edgar the many subjects of interest they had in common.

Mr. and Mrs. Langdon were one of those oddly matched pairs in each of which seems to abound the quality the other wants. She overflowed with good humour; he was crabbed and uncertain in temper; she had a wise way of saying foolish things; he had an arch clever way of talking nonsense. He would not have liked a sensible wife; it was a constant amusement to him to wrangle with Mrs. Langdon and puzzle her in argument, an easy triumph which did not, however, seem to lose its zest. He did not dislike his stepson, but yet could never resist making sarcastic remarks on what he considered his eccentricities; this would have irritated Mrs. Langdon, if anything could do so, for she worshipped her son and thought him in every respect perfect. During dinner there were a few skirmishes of this kind, but Mrs. Langdon had informed her husband that Eliza was quite of Edgar's way of thinking, and he was therefore too civil to say anything that would have displeased her. She was amused at his dry humour, and found the evening was pleasant even before Edgar arrived. He came in at nine, looking pale and tired, but seemed charmed to see Miss Conway. After a few words of general conversation, Mrs. Langdon proposed to her husband to play at piquet in another part of the room. "What, my dear," he whispered as she led him away, "are

they going to hold a council on Church affairs? She is a deaconess, is not she, or something of the kind?"

"No, my dear, you always make mistakes. It is the Protestants who have deaconesses, the English Catholics have sisters."

"Oh! then she is a sister?"

"No, she is nothing that I know of."

"But she is serious, is not she, as people used to say in my youth?"

"No, not more serious than she ought to be."

"And how much is that?"

"I really cannot answer that sort of question."

"No, my dear, I do not think you can, so will you cut."

In the meantime Edgar and Eliza did not begin by talking of the affairs of the Church. They spoke first of Annie. "You like my cousin very much, don't you?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," she answered: "she is so good, so true. If once she can see life, its duties, and its objects in their real light, she will be more than commonly good. But I sometimes wonder that having been educated by so superior a person as Mrs. Gerald there should be something in Annie that gives one the idea that her mind has not been very much cultivated. Do you perceive this?"

"I understand what you mean, but I do not think this is quite the case. There is perhaps in her a slowness of apprehension which sometimes almost seems like a deficiency of intelligence; but I have often been struck by her good sense and the excellence of her understanding."

"Your visit had a great effect upon her. Even after those few days I could see that she was much less childish, that she thought more. I am sure you would have great influence over Annie if you saw more of her."

Edgar remained silent a moment, and then said in a low voice, "How difficult it sometimes is to satisfy oneself as to which would be the most perfect of two lines of conduct."

"Yes," Eliza answered, "and there is nothing so trying in the world as perplexity. But others, and especially those who are used to guide and to direct us, often see more clearly than we do ourselves which course we should follow."

"I am in the greatest doubt at present on two of the most important points a man can have to decide upon. I cannot quite make up my mind whether to go into the Church or not, and in the next place whether, if I do so, I ought to marry. It may seem very strange that after so short an acquaintance I should speak to you so openly on such subjects as these; but, though I have not known you long, Miss Conway, I feel as if we were old friends and that I can open my heart to you without folly or indiscretion. On the first of the two points I mentioned I have nearly come to a decision. As I have taken my degree at Oxford I can be ordained with very little delay; and it seems to me that every man who enters our Church, with a full sense of the duties and responsibilities of a priest, is lending strength to the cause of truth."

"Oh, yes!" Eliza exclaimed, "it is an inestimable blessing that such persons should take holy orders. I am very, very thankful that such is your intention."

"What has forced the thought upon me has been the sight of so many poor creatures dying without absolution. While the Papists, as a matter of course, sent for their priests and received the last sacraments, our poor people, in the first place, had never, many of them, been taught to think anything of confession and absolution, or cared to send for a clergyman; and,

secondly, if they were visited on their death-beds by an Anglican priest, alas! it was often only to have a few prayers and verses of the Bible read to them, and not a word said about confession. Indeed, in one instance, a poor dying man, who had some wish to confess, was told to confess to God and not to man, and actually dissuaded from seeking sacramental absolution. On another occasion, when a clergyman was going to administer Holy Communion to a sick person, he spent some time in explaining that our Lord was not present in the sacrament as he said Roman Catholics falsely teach. It is heart-breaking to see God's ministers so utterly ignorant of the treasures of grace they hold in their hands; and baptized persons equally unconscious of their rights to those blessed privileges. I longed during those days, when death was striking on every side those poor sufferers, I pined to possess the right of speaking, of acting as a priest, and then came the thought that God was calling me to devote my life to the sacred ministry."

"I have no doubt it was an inspiration, dear Mr. Derwent."

"But then comes the second question. At the very moment that I was anxiously turning over in my mind that important subject, I happened to meet here Miss Rose, Annie's governess. I have known her, of course, all my life, and we have always been great friends. We happened to be left alone together for nearly an hour, and had a long conversation, in the course of which I heard, to my infinite surprise, that my Aunt Gerald's favourite wish is that I should marry Annie! It had never crossed my mind that such a thing would be possible, that she would be content to see her marry a man as poor as myself. I have always been very fond of Annie, and since my

last visit to Holmwood have felt an interest in her which might easily grow into a warmer affection. Of course there is everything in this idea that would naturally attract and tempt me—my attachment to Holmwood, the possession of great means of usefulness and influence, and also the thought, that, if I succeeded in winning Annie's heart and became her husband, I should lead her to the knowledge of those truths which, for those I love as well as for myself, I value more than life. But then there comes the doubt . . . ."

"What doubt? What makes you hesitate?"

"I do not know. I scarcely think that a clergyman should—mind I do not say that he may not, not even that he ought not—but I doubt if he should marry, especially at a time when all those who have the interests of the Church at heart, seem called upon to practise heroic self-denial."

"I admit," Eliza answered, "that there are great advantages in some cases in priests being unmarried. . . . ."

"There is a growing feeling of that kind in our Church, I think."

"But are there not cases also which form an exception to the rule, if, indeed, it amounts to a rule, and yours seems to me to be precisely of that number. Are we not to consider the greater amount of good which can be effected in one way or in the other in each individual instance. The *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, which you were telling us the other day was the motto of the Jesuits? I am not inclined to like them, but I admire these words. And now tell me, do you think Annie would object to your going into the Church?"

"No, as far I can judge by her letter. She even gives me a hint that I might become some day Vicar of Holmwood."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Derwent, if that could ever be realized, what a career of usefulness would open to you! What we want are opportunities for the full development and carrying out of Church principles. If our people could see the effect and judge of the results of Catholic teaching, we might look to a wonderful increase of English Catholicism. I am, perhaps, biassed by that thought. Holmwood, with its beautiful old church and its ancestral home, exhibiting the ideal of Catholic worship and Christian domestic virtue, with all its sanctity and its poetry, would convert half the county!"

"Mind that, when I said Annie seemed to approve of my intention, I did not mean to imply that she gave me the least reason to suppose she would marry me. You know, I might be Vicar of Holmwood when poor dear Mr. Pratt departs this life, and Annie be somebody else's wife."

"Not half the good would be done in that way as if you were her husband. And now as you have talked openly to me, I will in return speak openly to you. I have studied Annie's character, and I am quite convinced that with all her apparent strength of will and independence of opinion, she is very liable to be influenced. I believe this is one of the reasons that makes Mrs. Gerald wish her so much to marry you. She has, for instance, seen Miss Flower only a very few times, but I can perceive that she would be easily guided by that girl."

"And is not she a good companion for Annie?"

"I hardly know her; I only saw her once. She is very pleasing, remarkably so. I could not help being fascinated by her manner; but I suspect what is indeed perfectly natural, as she had lived abroad all her life, that she has either no religion at all, or a very strong bias towards Roman Catholicism. It could hardly

perhaps be otherwise, but it would not be the less a terrible danger for Annie. At present she is very ignorant of everything relating to the Church of Rome, and has the strongest prejudices against it; but, with her particular turn of mind, I should very much dread her hearing some of those insidious arguments which Papists use, to make it appear that the position of our Church is untenable; for sometimes she has seemed to come of her own accord to that mistaken conclusion, and I found it very difficult to make her understand the real state of the case. When she is puzzled, she falls back on Mr. Pratt's teaching, which is the safer extreme of the two for the present, for she could not long remain satisfied with the vague, miserable barrenness of mere Protestantism. But an influence leading her in an opposite direction would be most dangerous. I look to your influence to counteract the effects of her intimacy with Miss Flower."

"I have not the least idea if there would be any hope of her accepting me."

"I should say there was every probability of it, and am sure, from what I saw during your visit, and still more so since your departure, that she is, to say the least, very much inclined to return your affection."

"I do not know," Edgar replied, with a smile, "that I can say that I am actually in love with her yet. At Holmwood I never thought of such a thing; but since the possibility of obtaining her has been placed before me, I find in myself some of the symptoms of that passion such as Shakespeare describes them, and when I see her next I am only afraid of the malady taking too rapid a development. However, God knows I can say with truth that I would not accept the hope of this happiness which has been, as it were, offered to me, if I did not think it was His will I should accept it, or if it was to stand in the way of my following what I

believe He has called me to—the sacred duties of a priest."

Some further conversation took place between these young people which it is unnecessary to relate. Eliza succeeded in dissipating Edgar's doubts as to the desirableness of a clergyman's marrying, at any rate in his own case. Though she had recommended him to consult a spiritual adviser on the subject, she had unconsciously assumed the office herself. It is not fools only who rush in where angels fear to tread, but good and clever people also, especially those whose training and habits of mind have not taught them that there are days and hours in men's lives, turning moments in their destinies, too awful, too sacred, for casual advice, for unconsidered counsel, for decisions taken anywhere but on their knees and in God's presence. Perhaps few people think enough of the fearful responsibility of giving advice. More harm is sometimes done in this way than by acts of unkindness, or even perhaps by bad example. Especially if any possess the dangerous gift of influence, let them beware how by a few rash words they turn the scales in which the fate of a life, and of an immortal soul, may be trembling.

Edgar made up his mind that evening to try and win Annie. He said to himself, "Eliza is conscientious, sensible, and quite unprejudiced in the question. She thinks it would be the means of so much good, and I see that she is convinced Annie likes me." If he afterwards asked anybody else's advice, it was probably for the chance of its falling in with what he had previously resolved upon, not with the least idea of shaping his course according to its purport.

CHAPTER V.

The intimacy with Ita Flower, which Miss Conway so much dreaded for Annie, was progressing rapidly. There were few days that they did not contrive to meet. Mr. Hendon's carriage, on the days that Lady Emily did not go out, was always at Miss Flower's disposal; and, if Annie had not driven over in the morning to Marchbanks, Ita was almost certain to appear at Holmwood immediately after luncheon. They soon became friends, though their dispositions, tastes, and characters were very different. Ita's imaginative and pictorial view of things amused Annie, whilst she in turn was interested by her friend's original turn of mind, and matter-of-fact remarks. As to Mrs. Gerald, she was strangely capricious with regard to their young neighbour. She used to complain of her coming too often and monopolizing Annie's time; but, if she chanced not to appear for two or three days, she inquired why she stayed away, and seemed fidgety till she came again, and was very inquisitive as to the long conversations they held together.

"What were you talking about, my love, during those two whole hours I saw you sitting in the shrubbery?" she one day asked her niece.

"Was it so long as that? It did not seem so. Ita has seen so many places, and known all kinds of people abroad; she tells me all sorts of amusing things."

"Has she spoken to you much about her childhood?"

"Yes, a great deal. I think I know as much about Mentone as if I had lived there myself."

"But does she remember anything of the time before she came there? Does she ever speak of her parents?"

"No; I asked her one day if she had always been with Lady Emily? She said, 'No—not always;' that she lived, when she was very little, at a cottage near the sea-side somewhere, but that it seemed like a dream. I asked her if she was with her parents then, and I was sorry I put that question to her, for she grew very red, and the tears came into her eyes. So I suppose they are dead. It was a foolish, thoughtless question; for, if they had been alive, she would not have been, I suppose, Lady Emily's ward."

"Do you know why she does not come to church? Is she a Roman Catholic?"

"No. I thought at first she was, and so I asked her. She said, 'No;' but that she had been very much used to go to Roman Catholic churches, and that she liked them much better than ours."

"That is the worst of English girls living abroad; they are influenced by what they see of the pageantry of the Romish service, and then they get to dislike our simple and beautiful form of worship."

"I told Ita that Edgar says we have lighted candles; and incense and flowers, in some of our churches now; but she says it is not those sort of things she cares about. I do not like talking to her about religion. I do not know how to explain to her what Edgar says about our church being Catholic."

"You are quite right, I think, to avoid that sort of conversation. No good can come of young girls discussing such subjects. I sometimes question, Annie, whether Miss Flower is a good friend for you."

"Oh yes, she is, Aunt Gerald, I like her very much. It is only now and then that we ever speak about religion. Oh! and now I want to know . . . . . we are going to Carsdale next week, I suppose?"

"Yes; on Monday. The ball is to be on Thursday, and we stay till Saturday."

"Well; but Ita is asked—if she had only anybody to go with—and I want her to come with us."

"With us?"

"Yes; Lady Emily cannot go, of course, and it would be awkward for her to go with Mr. Hendon. I shall not amuse myself at all if she is not there. She and Edgar are the only two persons I like to be with now."

"And the poor Conways?"

"Well, I will tell you the truth. I like them, but not quite so much as I did before they were staying with us. Eliza is too good for me, she bores me a little about schools and poor people; and Jane is rather tiresome when you come to see a great deal of her."

"But does not Edgar talk almost as much as Eliza of those sort of things?"

"No, not so incessantly, and he sometimes makes me laugh. I like to hear him talk, whatever the subject is. But now I want to know, will you take Ita with us to Carsdale?"

"I suppose I must, if Lady Emily asks me."

"You cannot think how fond she is of you, Aunt Gerald."

"Of me!" Mrs. Gerald exclaimed, with a sudden colour rushing into her face, "what *can* make her fond of me? I have scarcely said two words to her."

"Well, she says she does not know why it is, she has taken such a fancy to you. Only to hear your voice, or sit in the same room with you, is a pleasure to her. She is such an odd girl; she thinks that

people have lived in some other world, or in this one perhaps, at some former time; and that when we like or dislike people in some unaccountable way, it is because we have known them in some other state of existence."

"I never heard such nonsense, my love. It is, I suppose, some superstitious notion that she has learnt from Catholics."

"No; she says the Abate Somebody, whom she knows at Mentone, told her it was a false idea."

"Well, the sooner she gets it out of her head the better. You have, I am sure, too much good sense to listen to such absurdities."

"Those sort of thoughts never came into my mind. I was never much alone, you know; perhaps that makes a difference. Ita used to be hours and hours by herself, and she has told me that all sorts of painful ideas, and sometimes funny ones, occurred to her. She fancied all kinds of things, and held long conversations with imaginary people, and invented histories about them, when she was sitting in the olive woods, or on the sea-shore at Mentone. And then about religion she was so bothered, always wondering what Heaven was like, and how anything could last for ever. She often longed to talk to somebody about those things, but, if she said anything to Lady Emily, she cried, 'Oh, pray, my dear, don't talk of that, you make me nervous'; and her governess answered, 'Il m'est défendu, Mademoiselle, de vous parler de religion.' So she had to think it all out for herself."

"Her case has been an unfortunate one in that respect. She had better speak to Mr. Pratt, or perhaps Edgar's views might suit her. But talking of him, Annie, I must tell you that I heard from him this morning, and that he has quite made up his mind to

become a clergyman. He has been to see the Bishop of——, and, after a long conversation he had with him, it was settled that the bishop will ordain him privately early in September. I suppose he was struck by his zeal and earnestness, and the purity of his motives in entering the Church."

"Early in September! As soon as that! Then will he not meet us at Carsdale? I know they have invited him."

"He says he hopes to be there for two or three days, and then he will go and stay with a clerical friend of his to prepare for his ordination. He speaks very beautifully on that subject, and very touchingly, too, about you, Annie. I do not think, when you meet again, that he will leave you long in doubt about his feelings."

"Oh, then, I hope we shall not meet at Carsdale."

"Why so?"

"Because I should not like him to speak of *that* anywhere but here. I would wish it to be on the terrace on a fine day, late in the afternoon. If he asks me to marry him, and I accept him, I shall be making him, as it were, a present of Holmwood; and I should like it to be looking as beautiful as possible, and then I should say, 'There, I give it you; it is yours.'"

"Why, Annie, I do not know you again! That is quite a poetical idea. But, my love, you seem to be always dwelling on that thought of giving him Holmwood. It is, after all, but a slight gift in comparison with your affection."

"No, not a bit of it. If I had not this place he is so fond of to give him, nothing would induce me to marry him. He is twenty times better and cleverer than I am; he has a taste for all sorts of things I do not care at all about; he can express what he feels, and I cannot. If I love people ever so much I cannot

tell them so. No, certainly. If I had only myself to give Edgar I would not accept him, but the possession of Holmwood, which he is so excessively fond of, will make up for my deficiencies."

When Edgar was describing Annie's character, he had said she was proud, and perhaps there was pride in the feeling she had just expressed, but there was also something touching in the humble estimate of herself which it implied. Mrs. Gerald felt this, and kissed her with deep emotion. Annie's manner of returning this caress had in it more kindness than warmth.

Mrs. Gerald, as usual, complied with her niece's wishes, and wrote to propose that Ita should go with them to Carsdale. The offer was gladly accepted, and on a lovely day towards the end of August they called for her on their way there. The two girls were in high spirits. Ita exclaimed, as they went through a lovely glade full of magnificent trees, "Oh, how beautiful!" and, as Mrs. Gerald looked at her beaming face, she also mentally exclaimed, "How beautiful!" and leaning back herself in the carriage, she listened to the conversation that went on between her two companions. It was merry, full of girlish nonsense and fun. But no smile came on Mrs. Gerald's lips; once there were a few tears in her eyes. When they reached the park of Carsdale and came suddenly on a new and extensive view, Ita's cheeks flushed with delight; soon the house itself appeared in sight—a large stately building standing in the midst of what looked like a boundless extent of flower-gardens, with fountains playing in the midst of the dazzling masses of colour, and bordered by a lake intersected with little green islands and floating clusters of the large-leaved water-lilies. In a transport of delight Ita seized Mrs. Gerald's hand, kissed it, and kept it a moment in her own. The hand so fondly held was quickly snatched away; she raised

her soft eyes with a look of surprise and then cast them down. Mrs. Gerald almost turned her back upon her, and smoothed Annie's hair, which had been blown about by the wind. Before she had done putting it to rights, they arrived at the house, and were shown into a drawing-room, where Lady Carsdale and her daughter, Lady Emma, were sitting with three or four other persons.

Lady Carsdale was a short, plump, good-natured-looking woman, full of the milk of human kindness, and on whom the cares and troubles of life seemed to have sat lightly. Though advanced in years there were no hard lines in her fair, placid face, and her small blue eyes twinkled with incessant glee. She seemed satisfied with herself and the whole world, except when the world made a fuss about anything. This discomposed her, though nothing else did. "If people only took things quietly, nobody would be uncomfortable," she used to say. The principle was to a certain degree a good one, only Lady Carsdale's application of it was too general. Lady Emma was very unlike her mother, a slight shade of superciliousness was visible in her countenance, a perceptible consciousness of being a person of consequence. There were two more ladies in the room, one of them was a Mrs. Harper, who had a sharp inquisitive face that seemed constantly asking a question; there was something in the very shape of her nose that reminded one of a note of interrogation, and her black eyes might have belonged to a detective officer. The other was Mrs. Walter Sydney, a lady of about thirty-seven or eight years of age, still pretty, and with a most attractive countenance. Her husband was an amiable-looking man, a great deal older than herself. Mrs. Gerald shook hands with her, and inquired after Mr. Sydney, her father-in-law, a very old gentleman, more than eighty years old, and then presented her to Annie.

Ita had no one to speak to. There was a gentleman sitting near her, but he went on reading the newspaper and did not change his position during the half-hour which elapsed before Lady Carsdale asked her guests the welcome question on such occasions, "Would not you like to see your rooms?" But he had, nevertheless contrived to gather in that time more information about the new comers than Mrs. Harper herself. Her curiosity was as active as Mr. Lorton's, but not under such good control. By not seeming to be on the watch, he discovered a thousand details which would have escaped a more unguarded observer.

There was a running current of jealousy going on between these two individuals. Nothing vexed Mr. Lorton more than to be told a piece of news by Mrs. Harper, and *vice versa*. Though each was glad to get every possible scrap of information, it was gall and wormwood to their feelings to find themselves in the case of being informed of a new fact by a rival collector. Ita, meantime, was quite satisfied with looking about the room. There seemed to her a whole world of beauty within those four walls. She was gifted (is it always a gift?) with an intense capacity for enjoyment, she took a keen delight in things which many people scarcely pay any attention to—which they would miss if taken away from them, but of the presence of which they are hardly conscious. The beautiful hot-house flowers in the recesses of the windows, and even the pretty Dresden china figures on the chimney-piece, gave her pleasure; but more than all, the pictures. Her glance wandered from the portrait of a knight in armour to that of a cardinal in his full robes; but when she caught sight of a group of ragged boys quarrelling over a melon, and then of a procession of pilgrims on their way to St. Peter's, her ecstasy was such that she could hardly help jump-

ing up from her chair. She tried to catch Annie's eye, but did not succeed; i she had, there would not, perhaps, have been much sympathy shown for her admiration of these works of art. She was in no hurry to move, there was still so much to look at; but everybody else was glad when Lady Carsdale led the way upstairs.

"We are quite a small party to-day," Lady Carsdale said as she stood for a moment in Mrs. Gerald's dressing-room. "My son and two of his friends, Mr. Bayham and Sir John Leislip, we expect by the next train. The Rockcastles are here; and Mrs. Wellersby —she is a Spaniard—and that clever Mr. Harman you met here last year are coming to-morrow. They are all very comfortable people that one feels quite at one's ease with. The Sydneys you know very well? Oh, of course you do. They are nearer neighbours of yours than of ours. It is a great pity that they have become Roman Catholics. They are very nice people. Emma used to be very fond of Mrs. Sydney, but lately she has seen very little of her. Lord Carsdale, however, insisted on my inviting them. Mr. Sydney has always been a great friend of his. It is so useless to make a fuss about that sort of thing. I am for people thinking and doing what they like about religion, so that they leave others alone, and keep their opinions to themselves. Formerly, in this part of the world, people in society did not trouble their heads about what religion others were of. I remember one of my constant partners, when I was a girl, was a Roman Catholic, and I never had the least idea of it till long afterwards. Now Emma knows not only if her partners are Catholics or Protestants, but what churches they go to, and what views they have. In my days people rode, hunted, dined together, and even married, without all the fuss that goes on now."

"As to marrying, dear Lady Carsdale," Mrs. Gerald answered, "I must say I am very much against mixed marriages. I would allow any amount of latitude in our own Church, but surely husbands and wives ought to be able to pray together."

"Oh, yes, of course it is much better; then there is no difficulty. I always said that, as Mr. Sydney became a Catholic, it was much better Mrs. Sydney should be one also. It makes things so much easier about children and everything."

"Yes, but then conversions, or rather perversions, to Popery are very sad. However, some people say that the best remedy will be the increase of Catholicism in our Church."

"Oh! I dare say. I believe that is what Emma thinks," Lady Carsdale replied. "I am sure I hope so." She would have hoped anything rather than have had an argument.

Mrs. Gerald had been suffering all day from neuralgia; she had struggled against it in order not to disappoint the two girls by putting off their visit to Carsdale. But while dressing for dinner the pain increased so much that she was forced to remain in her room. Lady Carsdale kindly came to fetch Annie and Ita, and took them down with her to the drawing-room. It was a great disappointment to Mrs. Gerald not to see Annie make her appearance almost for the first time in society. She asked her to come up after dinner and tell her how she had got on. Annie did so.

"Whom did you sit by, my love?"

"Between Lord Carsdown and a clergyman whose name I don't know."

"Did you converse much with your neighbours?" Mrs. Gerald inquired, with her hand pressed on her forehead to still the pain.

"Oh, yes; Lord Carsdown talked a great deal."

"What about?"

"About riding, and his horses. He is so surprised I have never seen a race. He described to me how exciting it is. He said that two people he knew were once watching a race, and it depended on which horse won if they were to be married or not. I wonder they could look at all. And sometimes people know they will be quite ruined, if one particular horse does not win. I am very glad Edgar is not a racing man."

"Do you think Lord Carsdown pleasing?"

"Yes, very pleasing; he has such an eager way of talking, and is so much struck by all one says. It amuses me when he thumps the table and cries, 'By Jove! you are quite right.' He said that five or six times at least during dinner."

"And your other neighbour?"

"I did not like him at all. He would tell me that Puseyites are very dangerous, insidious people, who are pulling down the Church of England, and that it is a dreadful thing that almost all the young men in these days who think seriously become Puseyites. He asked me if it was true that Edgar was going into the Church. When I said I believed he was, he shook his head and said he hoped he had not adopted those dangerous opinions, and went on arguing about it, which I hate, for though I cannot always agree with Edgar I cannot bear any one to find fault with him. As soon as I could I turned to Lord Carsdown, and asked him about the horse they are going to lend me to ride."

"You will enjoy yourself here, darling?"

"Oh, yes, very much. We are going to have a round game to-night."

"Do not stay up here then. Give me a kiss, dear love, and do not think any more about me."

"How is your head?"

"Still very bad. Never mind. I hope you will be amused, dearest."

Annie kissed her aunt and left the room, shutting the door after her not quite so quietly as might have been desirable for a person every nerve of whose head was quivering with pain. But Annie did not know herself what headaches are, and had not imagination enough to realize what she had not felt.

A little while afterwards the door was opened again very softly, and the lightest possible footstep crossed the floor. It was Ita, who timidly came up to the sofa on which Mrs. Gerald was lying, and sitting down by her side, said in a low voice, "I thought it would please you to hear how much my two neighbours at dinner admired Annie."

"Who were they?" Mrs. Gerald asked, raising her head from the pillow.

"Lord Rockcastle and Mr. Bayham, they both think her so handsome; and after we came out of the dining-room, Mrs. Sydney said the same thing. She is looking so particularly well to-night. And now I will not talk any more, but would you let me tie a handkerchief tightly round your head? It is the only thing that does mamma any good when she has a bad headache."

Mrs. Gerald smiled, and looked about for a handkerchief.

"I have brought a silk one, a very soft one," Ita said; and kneeling down by the sofa, she tied the handkerchief round Mrs. Gerald's head, and performed this little act in the quiet pleasant manner which gives to some people a peculiar talent for ministering to pain. This simple remedy afforded the throbbing temples some relief, and Mrs. Gerald remained for a few minutes motionless and silent, but a moment afterwards she said, "You had better go downstairs, my dear; do not let me keep you here."

"Do let me stay a little, I like so much to be with you."

"But Annie will miss you."

"I do not think she wants me, they are going to play a round game."

"The young people, you mean; you ought to be with them."

As she was saying this, Ita had slipped her arm under Mrs. Gerald's neck, and placed her head in a more comfortable position. "I see you have a talent for nursing," Mrs. Gerald said, with a smile; "you have really done me good."

"Have I? I am so glad." Ita hesitated a little, and then blushing, said, "I love you so much."

Mrs. Gerald was one of those persons to whom people seldom show affection; partly because there were not many who felt it, and also because those who did were apt to refrain from giving outward signs of that feeling, so greatly did the formality of her manner repel its expression. Ita's simple exclamation, and the little caress which accompanied it, took her by surprise, and caused her a sort of agitation. There are, to use a common expression, strange ins and outs in the human heart, and especially in natures at once impetuous and reserved. Mrs. Gerald's passionate affection for Annie had never met with any return beyond a very matter-of-fact, proper, dutiful sort of regard. In ordinary cases this would have chilled and disgusted her, for she measured her likings for others very much by what is called in French *la toise personelle;* but this did not apply to the child who had been snatched from the grave in her infancy, and restored to her when she had thought never to see her again—to the girl whom she had watched, trained, and cared for with parental affection, in whom she had centred all her hopes, her pride, and her delight. She had

always felt—more than she knew, perhaps; certainly more than she had ever acknowledged to herself—the want of tenderness in Annie's character, but it had never been on her she visited the pain it gave her. On the present occasion it was with Ita that she seemed vexed. Why should a mere stranger, one to whom she had only shown a little casual kindness, express what Annie so seldom did—a warm affection for her. She felt almost angry at the contrast being forced on her notice, and there was a shade of annoyance in the manner with which she said, "Really, my dear Ita, I do not understand what I can have done to make you so fond of me in so short a time."

Like a sensitive plant bruised by a slight touch, not meant to hurt, but exquisitely painful, Ita felt one of those pangs which run, not like a dagger, but like a thorn, into her heart. She kissed Mrs. Gerald's hand; that little act of homage familiar to those who have lived much abroad, but which generally surprises English people, and then said, "I will go down to Annie."

Mrs. Gerald wished her good-night; she felt that she had been unkind, but if she had said anything it would have been too much or too little. When the door was shut and the young girl gone, she burst into tears.

The round game was going on when Ita slipped quietly into the drawing-room. A whist party had also been made up, and Lady Emma was playing on the pianoforte. Most of the persons present seemed to think that the chief advantage of music was to help on conversation. Annie was very much engrossed with her hand at Commerce, and did not pay much attention when Ita whispered to her that Mrs. Gerald's headache was a little better; and, as Mrs. Sydney seemed the only person at that moment not engaged

in any way, she went and sat by her. Mrs. Sydney was listening to the playing, but smiled and looked pleased as she made room for her on the sofa near the pianoforte. When the piece was finished, and some of the gentlemen came up to speak to Lady Emma, Mrs. Sydney said to Ita, "Are you fond of music?"

"Yes, very fond of it; but I am afraid I like a barrel-organ better than some kinds of playing on the pianoforte."

"A barrel-organ has its merits, I allow. Do you play yourself?"

"Not well; but I can remember tunes and play them from memory—I like my own playing as I do my own thoughts. Nobody else I think would."

The simplicity with which this was said, made Mrs. Sydney smile, and she answered, "Perhaps I should. Will you try some day?"

"Yes, with great pleasure; but it is not *real* playing —not at all like Lady Emma's."

"She has a great deal of execution and taste, but it is not the sort of playing I care about. I believe that the sort I like has gone out of fashion; I only hear old people play now with a soft touch that seems to linger on the notes and to draw from them tones that are almost like speaking. My husband's mother used to play in that way."

"Oh yes: I know exactly what you mean. Lady Emily, too, played like that. When I was a child it was my delight to sit by the pianoforte and listen to her playing. I could have fancied she had velvet at the end of her fingers, and one tune followed another as if a bird was singing. I like that so much better than pieces and variations; it made me feel as if I was myself the instrument played upon. I do hope there will be a great deal of music in heaven. Do you think there will?"

"I suppose all that is beautiful and charming on earth is a foreshadowing of the enjoyments of heaven: as beautiful scenery, I often think, must be a relic of Paradise. But Holy Scripture says that we can make to ourselves no idea of heaven."

"Almost everybody that believes there is a heaven seems to make sure of going there."

"Too sure, perhaps."

"Have you ever met with anybody who really longed to leave this world, not because they were unhappy in it, but because they wished to go to heaven?"

"Yes, I know that many do, and I have seen it myself in one instance."

"Was it a young or an old person?"

"A young person."

"And one who was happy on earth?"

"She had known much sorrow, but it had passed away, and at last she had everything to make her happy . . . ."

"Ah, but that is very different from being happy!"

Mrs. Sydney smiled sadly. "You are right; but I think my sister, for it is of her I am speaking, was happy during the last years of her life; but still she longed, intensely longed, for heaven."

"Are you speaking of that beautiful Mrs, Neville, whom Mrs. Gerald told us was the loveliest person she ever knew."

"Yes; she was my sister."

"Was she not called Ginevra?"

"Yes."

"I ought not perhaps to have asked you about her."

"Why not? I like to speak of those who are gone before us, and I feel nearer to her now than when she was on earth. Then we had not the same faith.

Though I do not see her now, it seems to me as if we were more closely united."

"You are a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes; I was received into the Church two years after my sister's death."

"Is it as great a change as one fancies it must be?"

"An immense change certainly, but not of the sort many people imagine."

"What do you think they imagine?"

Mrs. Sydney smiled, and said, "That for instance, we cease to care for our relatives; that we think it right to tell untruths and to betray confidence. I was asked by a very dear friend, a few days after my conversion, if I should think it my duty to show all her letters to my confessor."

Ita, too, could not help smiling. "It would be hard work," she said, "for confessors to read over all the letters some ladies write and receive; but what is the great change that you do feel?"

"It would be impossible to answer that question in a few words. It is like setting foot on dry ground after slipping about in a bog, or like the clearing off of a mist and getting into sunshine. It is like laying hold of something real after grasping at shadows. Yes, it is a great change."

"And has it made you happier?"

"It has given me a happiness which I believe none but Catholics know. I was very happy as a girl; very, very happy as a wife; but I had no idea of what real joy is till I became a Catholic."

"But good Protestants say they are quite happy and satisfied with their religion."

"Yes; but is it not because they do not know what it is to be in the true Church? I used to say the same thing in former days; I remember often telling my dearest Ginevra, who had always been a Catholic, that

I was sure I had the same consolations and helps in my religion as she had in hers. She could not know, I said, what I felt, and so how could she tell. But when my husband became a Catholic, he who had always been a good pious Protestant, not belonging to any extreme party, but acknowledged by all to be a thoroughly good man—when he assured me that since he had made the change he had never had a doubt as to the truth of the Catholic religion, and found in it helps and consolations he had never dreamt of before, I could not but be influenced by what he said."

"And now you can judge for yourself?"

"Now I can remember and compare. Suppose a child had been born and brought up in a dark room, and had never gone out of it. He might be quite satisfied, because, not having ever known anything different, he could not possibly form an idea of the beauties of earth, sea, and sky, or desire anything beyond what his prison could afford. . . ."

"He might have perhaps some vague yearnings, an undefined, restless pining for light and fresh air, even if he was not exactly conscious of it. . . ."

"Perhaps so. And have not some persons a feeling in their souls which would answer in a spiritual sense to what you describe?"

"Yes, I think they sometimes have. I wonder if the child would listen if a stranger came and talked to him of the world and its beauties."

"I should think that would partly depend on the child's character, and partly on what had been instilled into his mind since his birth. If his nurse and companions had always kept repeating that outside those four walls everything was bad, deceitful, and poisonous, and that those who would try to take him out of prison were knaves or fools, that were either deluded themselves, or were endeavouring to deceive him by speak-

ing of green fields, fair flowers, and starry skies, he would probably stop his ears whenever they approached him, or, if obliged to listen, would answer, 'I know better than you do what a horrid place you live in.'"

"I do think it is odd that people are not more inclined to attend to the opinion of those who have made the trial of both religions."

"I suppose you are a Protestant?"

"Yes; that is if I am anything at all. I have lived entirely abroad, and was not taught a great deal about religion whilst I was a child. Since I have been grown up, and have come to England, I find that English clergymen do not agree at all amongst themselves. One person tells me that I am a Protestant; another a Catholic. One says the Bible is everything, another the Prayer-book. Some tell one to beware of Rome and Roman Catholicism, as if they were the devil; others say they want to make the Church of England as like the Roman Catholic Church as possible, and be reunited to it. Sometimes I hear that the Anglican Church is the only Catholic Church in this country, and sometimes that it is only a branch of the Universal Church. It is very puzzling. One clergyman told me that the clergyman in the next parish to his had established an idolatrous form of worship; and, when I repeated this to Mr. Hendon, he said that that other clergyman says ours is a downright heretic. I tried to find out what the Prayer-book teaches; but that is worse than all. In one place it says one thing, and another in another. I cannot make it out at all. I began to think that the prayers—a good many of them at least—were like those in the Catholic Prayer-books, and that, perhaps, it came nearly to the same; but when I looked at the Thirty-Nine Articles it seemed quite a different religion. I said this to a Miss Conway, whom I met at Holmwood, and she

tried to explain to me that everybody signed them—all the clergy at least—but that they did not understand them in their natural sense; and that it was for the sake of peace that they had been drawn up, so that people might subscribe them, and yet believe as they pleased. Do not you think it is very puzzling?"

"So puzzling, that it is really impossible to believe that such a Church can be a church at all."

"I thought at one moment I would be a real good, quiet Protestant, and think of nothing but what the Bible said. But this was worse still. I could not read it without thinking who was right and who was wrong; some texts seemed to tell one way and others another. I thought there were Catholic texts and Protestant texts; and one day I could not help fancying the Unitarians were right, and this made me very unhappy."

"What made you think so?"

"That text, 'My Father is greater than I,' and I could not find anything positive about the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity being equal. It made me so wretched, for I could not bear to think as those people do—they seem hardly to be Christians."

"Did you keep all these thoughts to yourself?"

"Yes. What was the use of talking about them? I had not often opportunities of speaking of such things to people; but, if I did, they only told me it was right to believe in their way; and how was I to know that they knew better than those who said just the contrary? I have spent miserable hours by myself reading some parts of the Bible which made me quite miserable; for instance, what St. Paul says about predestination; and then again the idea of eternity, even a happy eternity, used to give me a giddy, aching, terrible sensation which was almost unbearable. I have suffered a great deal in these ways. I do not know if other children

feel as I did; but what I do know is, that if it had not been that other things distracted my thoughts, I should have been almost driven wild by all those doubts. Sometimes the thought came (and that was the worst of all), that I did not believe in anything, and then I felt so dreadfully wicked!"

"But are you troubled with those doubts now?"

"No; not since a lady, who lived near us at Mentone, lent me a little French Catholic book, in which I found that thoughts of that kind, if we detested them, were not wicked. When I was not so frightened about them, they went away; and then if I went into a Catholic Church I could always pray; it seemed as if God was near me, as if I felt His presence—"

"He *was* there," Mrs. Sydney murmured in a low voice.

"How strange it is that I should speak to you in this way," Ita said, suddenly astonished at her unreserve towards a stranger. "I wonder what makes me do it."

"Perhaps it may be God's will you should; perhaps He means me to be of use to you. I never went through the trials you have done in childhood and early youth. I took everything for granted, and never questioned the truth of what I had been taught. I was pained when my sister came home at her being a Catholic, but still I troubled myself very little on the subject. It was vexatious, I thought, that she did not come to church with us, and that was all. I think the change in her husband struck me more than anything else—more than her patience through a long trial—more than her holy life and death. I have seen a great many good and pious Protestants, but I have never seen a person who had been proud, selfish, hard, worldly, become, under the influence of religion, so entirely changed as was the case with my brother-in-

law after his conversion, and I scarcely think such miracles of grace occur except in the Catholic Church."

"Is not Mr. Neville now a priest?"

"Yes, and a most devoted and hard-working one. Ever since his wife's death he has had but one object and one thought."

"To do good?"

"Yes, the highest sort of good—to make men know and love our Lord."

"Where is he now?"

"In one of the poorest districts in London, in the midst of his Irish fellow-countrymen. When I look back and think of the days when we first knew him, it seems incredible. He always says he has so much to atone for. You have heard perhaps of the strange manner in which his marriage with my sister was concealed for some time, and the reason of that secresy?"

"Yes, I heard Mr. Hendon speak of it some years ago when he came to see us at Mentone, and Mrs. Gerald the other day reminded me of it."

"He often says he is not worthy to be a priest, but he is so good and humble now. He thinks Ginevra's life was shortened by the sufferings she went through during those terrible years, and the only thought which comforts him is that all that misery increased her holiness and merits."

"You must have found it difficult to forgive him. I think that must be the hardest thing in the world to bear, seeing those we love ill-used."

"So it is, but in this case I did not know how cruelly he had acted towards my sister, till his own grief and repentance compelled me to pity and forgive him."

Just at that moment Lady Emma began playing

again, and the conversation was interrupted. Ita gave a little sigh, and turned towards the pianoforte with a look of resignation. She was charmed with Mrs. Sydney in the way young girls are apt to be with an attractive married woman, much older than themselves. She delighted in the bright smile, the pleasant voice, the kind, unaffected manner of her new friend. The history of her sister's singular marriage and early death, which had made a deep impression upon her some years before, invested Mrs. Sydney herself with a kind of romantic interest in her eyes. She longed to go on talking to her of Mrs. Neville, but there did not occur another opportunity that evening. After the music was over some of the gentlemen came up to the sofa where they were sitting, and amongst them Lord Carsdown and Sir John Leislip, who had been playing at billiards, and discussing the looks of the young ladies who had arrived that day.

"What do you think of the heiress?" Lord Carsdown had asked his friend.

"She is rather handsome, but she does not look distinguished," Sir John replied whilst he chalked his cue.

"Well I should say she was particularly distinguished-looking. She has a magnificent figure, and such a fine open countenance."

"But such large hands! and such a wide mouth! That other girl—I forget her name—who came with them, she is pretty enough, with her soft brown eyes and merry laugh."

"Yes, she has a nice little face."

"Is she the other's *dame de compagnie?*"

"No, she is a niece, or ward, or something of that sort, of Lady Emily Hendon's."

"She has plenty to say for herself. I like talking to girls who are just come out, if they are quick."

"Fast, you mean?"

"No, quick, not fast—nothing is more different."

"I thought they were synonymous words."

"No, not when applied to girls."

When the game was finished, the two young men and Mr. Sydney, who had been looking on, moved to the part of the room where Ita was sitting with Mrs. Sydney.

"Miss Flower," Lord Carsdown said, "What do you think of Miss Derwent's looks? Leislip and I have been differing on that point."

"I like her face so much," Ita replied, "that I can hardly tell if I admire it; and yet I am pretty sure I do think her handsome, and she is such a nice girl."

"Is she? Is it true that she is engaged to a cousin of hers, one Edgar Derwent, as our forefathers would have said?"

"I have never heard it from herself or Mrs. Gerald, but I know it is reported."

"For my part, I think it is very unfair," Lord Carsdown said, "to hand over a girl in that way to a cousin without even giving her the opportunity of seeing other people."

"I am sure Annie would never be handed over to anybody. She would know her own mind as well as any one in the world. If she is going to marry Mr. Derwent, it must be that she likes him."

"But if she has not seen much of other people,' Sir John said, "she may meet, when she goes into society, with those she would have liked better."

Ita shook her head with an impatient little gesture which was peculiar to her, and exclaimed: "Now, really, if you did not mind my saying so, I think that idea is such a very . . . ."

"Very foolish one," Sir John said with a smile.

"Well, yes, I think so," Ita replied; "because, unless a person could see at once all the people she was ever to meet, the same thing might always happen. I suppose it is loving one person very much that prevents the possibility of liking another; do not you think so, Mrs. Sydney?"

"Yes, as long as the feeling lasts; but as it may change, the only real security consists in the principle of duty which makes a woman love only where she ought to love."

"Then you agree with me, and not with Sir John?"

"No, not quite. I should think it desirable for a girl to see something of society before she marries, not exactly for the reason he mentions, but because, without it, she can hardly judge whether the character and tastes of her future husband are likely to suit her or not."

Sir John remarked, "I have heard people say that the more dissimilar they are the better."

"I cannot believe that," Ita answered. "Of course, if people had the same faults, it would be very bad; and yet I do not know. Two misers would get on better than a generous husband and a stingy wife."

"They might quarrel less," Mr. Sydney said, laughing; "but then they might die of starvation."

"What do you think, Mrs, Sydney?" Lord Carsdown asked. "Ever since I can remember, I have heard you and Mr. Sydney quoted as the happiest couple in the world, so you ought to be good authority. Are your tastes and characters alike?"

Mrs. Sydney turned her dark blue eyes on her husband with a look of unmistakable affection, and said: "Are they, Walter?"

"No, my dear, decidedly not," he answered with an amused smile; "but as you would marry an old man like me, you knew what you had to expect."

"You mean that I like to dine out and you do not, and all that sort of thing? You would never go beyond your library and your garden if you could help it; but it is very good for you to be dragged out sometimes, and to be obliged to do what I like."

"There," Sir John cried out, "there is dissimilarity of taste working well. We are getting to the root of the matter."

"But in some respects I have already seen that you and Mr. Sydney *are* alike," Ita said.

"Indeed, what have you observed in us?"

"First, that you have both happy faces—there is one likeness; and then this: when a servant spilt some sauce on Mr. Sydney's arm and hand at dinner, he managed to hide it so quickly that nobody, and hardly the servant himself, noticed it; and after dinner, when Lady Rockcastle made a blunder and confounded together Charlemagne and Charles the Fifth, you, Mrs. Sydney, set her right so cleverly, that it only seemed as if she had said one word for another by mistake. I am sure you are both kind, and that must be a great comfort. It would be dreadful to see any one we loved giving pain to others."

"And yet it is sometimes right to give pain," Mr. Sydney said.

"Oh, very seldom, I hope."

"What dreadfully quick eyes you must have, Miss Flower," Sir John said. "If you see people's merits so quickly, you must be equally observant of their faults."

"Yes, I am; and there are two persons in this room I cannot endure."

"Do mention who they are, or I shall think I am one."

"Oh no, not you. One of them is that man who is speaking to Lady Emma."

"Mr. Lorton?"

"Yes. The name of the other person I will not mention, because I may perhaps change my mind."

"That's right," Mr. Sydney said. "La Rochefoucauld said we ought to live with our friends as if they were to be one day our enemies. A more Christian maxim would be to speak of every one as if he might one day be our friend."

"Nothing, I am sure, would ever make me like Mr. Lorton, he looks like the man who bothered Harry Hotspur 'when the fight was done.'"

"He is, in his way, as quick an observer as you are, Miss Flower."

"Then I do not only dislike, I quite hate him."

"Ah, there is an instance of similitude of character producing hatred. You and Lorton should not marry."

"Heaven forbid! Who could marry such a man?"

"Lady Emma Cars is supposed to be thinking of it."

"Lady Emma! Oh, then, what is the use of her looking so proud? I thought she was like Lady Clara Vere de Vere. I wish she would break Mr. Lorton's heart."

"I doubt his having one."

"Oh, come!" Mrs. Sydney exclaimed, "you young people are very unmerciful. Hearts often lie hidden deeper than you know of."

Sir John looked earnestly at Ita, and said, "Do you think you know when people have hearts or not?"

"I guess sometimes," she answered, a little blush and a bright smile dimpling over her sweet face.

"Oh, that horrid procession!" Sir John exclaimed, as Lady Carsdale got up and led the way to the table, where a long array of flat candlesticks stood. "What a barbarous custom it is for people all to go to bed at the same time, whether they like it or not. We

were just beginning to be pleasant, and now you must perform what a foreigner called 'the English ceremony of walking upstairs with a candle in your hand.' He brought his own down the next morning, thinking that part of the function. Good night, Miss Flower."

CHAPTER VI.

On the following day Mrs. Gerald's headache was better; and, after breakfast, she came down to the drawing-room. Lady Carsdale greeted her with the assurance that everybody was enchanted with Annie. It might be so, but, as far as appearances went, it was Ita who seemed to be the favourite with most people. Even Lady Emma, to the annoyance of some of the party, seemed determined to monopolize her; she carried her off to her own room and, after detailing some of her plans for improving the neighbourhood, told her of several things she ought to make Mr. Hendon attend to at Marchbanks.

"But I can't make him do anything," Ita expostulated.

"That must be because you do not set about it in the right manner. Where there is a will, there is a way. I am sure if I was staying in his house as you are, I could manage it."

"But then, you see, Lady Emma, you are yourself, and I am myself."

"But I can tell you how to set about it; if you have not tried, of course you have not succeeded. He ought to have a school under Government; the number of children is sufficient, and it is the only way of securing a really good education. And then he ought

to build more cottages and not to allow lodgers. As to the Church, it is quite disgraceful to see it filled up with those horrid pews; such a scandal ought not to be allowed in these days."

"Why is it worse in these days than in any other days, Lady Emma?"

"Because people ought to know better."

"But I don't see why I should know better than Mr. Hendon and the clergyman."

Lady Emma's countenance seemed to imply, though she did not utter the words, "Not you, indeed, but *I*." However, she only said, "Because . . . . because it stands to reason that it is a great abuse for rich people to enjoy these sort of privileges. There ought to be equality in the house of God, every reasonable person must see this; but Mr. Hendon belongs to a class of men . . . ."

What class Ita was not destined to hear, for at that moment Lord Carsdown burst into his sister's room to inquire what were her plans for the day. He was charmed to find Ita in what he called Emma's den, and she was very glad the conversation was interrupted. The task of lecturing Mr. Hendon about the state of the parish at Marchbanks, did not at all take her fancy.

"Will you drive to Grantley Manor, Em? Mrs. Sydney wants to go and see how her tribe of children get on without her, or had you rather . . . ."

"Anywhere but to Grantley Manor," Lady Emma said, in a sharp voice.

Ita's eyes had brightened. She had taken what Annie called an enthusiasm about Mrs. Sydney, and would have enjoyed nothing so much as to have driven with her to Grantley Manor.

"You can take some of the company if you like to the Roman Camp," Lord Carsdown said, "for there

are to be two sets of carriages. Which party will you belong to, Miss Flower?"

Ita was longing to say what she really wished, but was afraid it would not be civil to Lady Emma; and, whilst she hesitated, the latter pronounced the verdict, "She ought to see the Roman Camp."

Ita began to think that if she lived much with Lady Emma it would make her like to do everything she ought not. But she was made to be in one respect Lady Carsdale's *beau idéal*, she never made a fuss about anything, and so remained doomed to the Roman camp. Lord Carsdown was fidgeting about the room, and looking at the weekly papers which were lying on the table. "I say, Emmy," he exclaimed, "I don't understand your High Church people. Here I find one of your favourite organs—is not that the word?—speaking of the decayed carcase of Protestantism; and another calling the Bishop of —— a good-natured old Pagan. I wonder what you would have said if poor Mrs. Syd had used such expressions."

"I do not defend the expressions, but it is natural to feel strongly when one of our own bishops promulgates heresy."

"They had better make *you* a bishop, Emmy. It has always been your hobby to set everything to rights."

"There is a great deal that wants setting to rights."

"I daresay there is. Mrs. Harper's wig, for instance; it comes down so low on her forehead, that it makes her eyes look unnaturally sharp. By Jove, what a woman that is for talking! She is anxious to find out, Miss Flower, if you are related to a Mr. Flower she knew abroad. So you must prepare to be cross-examined about your cousins three or four times removed."

Ita coloured, and said nothing.

"Why is not Mr. Harman arrived, Em? I thought he was to come yesterday."

"So he was, but something or other prevented him happily."

"*Happily?* I think he is a very pleasant sort of man. Why don't you like him?"

"He talks, but he does not converse; I always feel that he would say just the same things if he was speaking to any one else as he does to me, and I cannot bear that."

"I say that is all pride. Those who have the honour of speaking to you must bear it in mind all the time I suppose."

"I like people to know whom they are speaking to."

"That they may treat you with due respect?"

"No; but I expect them to think of what I say as well as what they say, and that is what Mr. Harman never does."

"I hope I thought of what you said at dinner, Miss Flower, yesterday, as well as of what I said, as that is the right thing."

"Oh, yes, you repeated everything I said," Ita innocently answered.

"With the addition of 'by Jove,'" Lady Emma added.

Lord Carsdown reddened a little. "You are so confoundedly sharp. It is very hard on a man to have a clever elder sister. By the way, what are the essays about this month? Has Em enrolled you in her literary society, Miss Flower? There are I don't know how many young ladies who look upon her as an oracle. They write monthly essays, and she judges of the merits of these compositions, and cuts out what she pleases. She is a great tyrant in her way, is Em. Don't knock under to her too much; she will rule you with an iron rod, if you don't take care. Come, what are the essays about this month? The likelihood of the moon being inhabited, or the character of Jack the Giant-killer?"

"You may talk as much nonsense as you please. There is more ability in what my friends write than in anything you and your friends have ever written."

"As far as I am concerned, I dare say; but I don't see why you should abuse my friends. There is Edgar Derwent, for instance; he is a fellow who would write you all down in a minute. Do you know him, Miss Flower?"

"No; but I have often heard of him at Holmwood. He is going into the Church, I believe."

"And is he going to marry Miss Derwent?"

"I do not know; people say so."

"I cannot make her out," Lady Emma said.

"There is nothing in her to make out," Ita answered. "She is what she looks—good, honest, and true."

"Mr. Lorton thinks her like one of Murillo's Madonnas—the same kind of large deep eyes and broad forehead. Well, I must go and order the carriages. You have booked Miss Flower, then, for the Roman camp?"

"Not if she would like better to go with the others. I always wish people to do what they please."

Lady Emma thought she was speaking the truth. There is a wonderful deal of unconscious lying in the world!

Ita said, "The Roman camp must be very interesting." Perhaps she should have said ought to be so, for at that moment she certainly did not feel any particular interest on the subject.

When the carriages drove up to the door after luncheon, she found that Mrs. Gerald, Annie, Mrs. Sydney, and Sir John Leislip were going in one of them to Grantley Manor; and that she was to drive with Lady Emma, Mrs. Harper, and Mr. Lorton in the other to the Roman camp. Her heart sank a little within her at that arrangement; the other party would have

been so much the pleasantest. How keen are those little disappointments which stand, as it were, midway between the miseries of childhood and the real sorrows of life. Lord Carsdown was on the box, and he could hardly help smiling when he overheard Mrs. Harper seizing the opportunity, before they were out of the park, of saying to her opposite neighbour in an insinuating voice—

"I wonder, Miss Flower, if you are related to dear old Mr. Flower, whom I knew at Naples some years ago?"

"No, I am not," Ita answered.

"Oh, I thought it likely you were, as you have lived so mueh abroad. It was not then at Naples that you were brought up?"

"No; I have never been there.'

"But you were born in Italy?"

"No, not exactly," Ita answered, blushing very deeply; she thought Mrs. Harper one of the most disagreeable women she had ever met with.

"I remember, some years ago, when I was travelling along the Corniche, that Lady Emily Hendon's villa was pointed out to me on a height, a little above the road, near a little chapel, before arriving at Mentone. But, somehow, I fancied she must have been at Naples also, and that you were the daughter or niece of my old friend. Flower is not a common name; I never knew any one called so except him, and now you. Is Ita your Christian name?"

"My name is Margaret."

"Ah, Margarita!" Mr. Lorton cried; "Ita is a pretty diminutive. I suppose you speak Italian fluently?"

"Yes, I know Italian."

Mrs. Harper was not satisfied. "What was the name of the villa you lived in near Mentone?"

"The Villa Sant' Anna; but it was oftener called the Villa Hendon."

"I suppose your earliest recollections are of that place?"

No answer was made to this remark.

"There is nothing about which people are more different," Lady Emma said, "than in the power of recollecting their own childhood. I can call to mind all sorts of things that happened when I was in the nursery."

"Do you look back to childhood as a golden age?" Mr. Lorton asked.

"Far from it. I have always been sceptical about the happiness of children. How can the subjects of the most irresponsible power in the world be happy? I know of no more absolute tyranny than that of the school-room."

"Is not the despotism of a woman who knows her own power and uses it without mercy, still more tyrannical?" Mr. Lorton asked, folding his arms and trying to look sentimental.

Lady Emma laughed, and Ita felt provoked with them both.

"Has Lady Emily given up her villa abroad?" Mrs. Harper iuquired.

"No."

"Then I suppose you will return to the South next winter?"

"I suppose so."

What self-control the world teaches; how like virtue are its requirements at times. Ita could not help feeling angry at Mrs. Harper's pertinacious curiosity; but necessity compelled her to show her impatience only by the brevity of her answers and a troubled look, which none of her companions noticed. She was left to the mercy of her opposite neighbour's inquisitiveness,

for Lady Emma and Mr. Lorton kept up an animated conversation between themselves. Ita could not at all understand the pleasure Lady Emma seemed to take in that gentleman's society; for though she was not very much charmed with what she had seen of her, it struck her, nevertheless, that she was too good to take an interest in the vapid talk of a person who seemed to care for nothing but the emptiest worldly gossip. She thought of the schools, the essays, the parish reforms, and wondered what points of sympathy could exist between them. There are enigmas of this kind which often puzzle us; it requires some knowledge of character to solve them. Lady Emma had a craving for admiration, joined to a pride which would not suffer her to appear to court it. She was not handsome, and felt early that she must seek distinction more by her merits than her attractions. She took therefore a line of her own, and became a person looked up to by a certain number of friends and acquaintances, who made much of her, as the centre of a small philanthropic and literary circle. Her position, her activity, her not inconsiderable amount of talent, which, though it did not amount to genius, rose above mediocrity, enabled her to play a part amongst those who were exactly of the same way of thinking as herself. She had not the gift of winning others, or of moulding them; they must be made to her hand, and, in that case, she ruled them absolutely. What Lady Emma said, or Lady Emma wrote, formed the opinions of her own particular set of associates and readers, almost as much as the leading articles of the "Times" guide those of the English public. This acknowledgment of her power and homage to her superiority gratified, but did not quite satisfy, her restless desire for admiration. Nobody had ever fallen in love with her, and when Mr. Lorton did, or at any rate professed to

do so, the film which so often forms itself over a woman's eyes concealed from her all his imperfections and his entire want of sympathy with all she had hitherto cared about. It seemed to open to her a different view of life, it was quite a new excitement. It is said that Madame de Stael declared she would rather have been a beautiful woman than have possessed all the genius she was gifted with. If this is true, it would go far to show how little genius without religion can exalt the soul. We cannot imagine Madame Swetchine, or even Eugenie de Guérin in the humble obscurity of her decayed old *manoir*, uttering such a sentiment. Neither of these enjoyed in life the prestige of a literary reputation; they never knew the good they would do to thousands and thousands of readers, but they would never have compared for a moment the gratification of conscious beauty with the intellectual gifts which gave to their goodness so great a charm, and to their lives so deep an interest. There is but one thing greater on earth than genius—and that is holiness; united they work miracles. And genius lies hid in strange corners, it lurks where it never has had, and perhaps never will have, opportunities of expanding. In our days it does not remain buried in obscurity as frequently as heretofore, but circumstances, idleness, or humility still conceal in many instances its existence. Is it not suppressed genius that makes some people so charming, and others so disagreeable? In the former it finds an outlet in happy ways of amusing, cheering, and helping people; or in a gaiety and originality, which gives to their conversation an indescribable fascination. It betrays itself in their talent for embellishing a home, planning a garden, and even arranging flowers. It explains the unaccountable influence they exercise; it is a fire which warms and brightens all within its reach. In the latter case it acts like a sup-

pressed moral gout, and makes life almost unendurable. If these kind of geniuses wrote books, their families would be happier; but, in the former case, let those who rejoice in their sunshine pray that they may never set pen to paper.

Ita had perhaps a little touch of genius in her composition, unused except for loving and social purposes. One of the characteristics of this hidden fire is enjoyment of beauty in nature and art, and quick sympathy with everything that works on the imagination. When the carriage stopped on the brow of the hill where the remains stand of what had once been a Roman camp, her heart swelled with delight at the glorious view before her, and at that thought which to some people is full of strange emotion, that the very scenery before her was gazed upon in the days of yore by men with whom we have at once so little and so much in common. The day was perfectly beautiful—a true lovely English day—the sweet short grass of the downs scented with wild thyme; the woods below the height which they had reached already displaying their bright autumnal tints; the heather and the gorse in gold and purple radiance adorning the waste patches of lands between the masses of forest trees. "I wonder if the Romans admired all this as much as we do!' she exclaimed; "did they write much about scenery in their books?"

"There, Emmy," Lord Carsdown exclaimed, "let that be the subject of your next essays. The comparative appreciation of . . . . of scenery shall it be, Miss Flower, or of the beauties of nature, by the Ancients and the Moderns?"

"You are coming out quite in a new line, brother," Lady Emma said; "you will soon write an essay yourself."

"Did not Virgil write some very beautiful things?" Ita asked.

"I should think he did," Lady Emma answered with rather a scornful smile.

"But what I want to know is, whether those old poets admired wild scenery. Do not they talk of rocks, and mountains, and precipices as of something horrid, and only of cornfields and orchards as something beautiful? I wonder what makes the difference between their idea of beauty and ours."

"As to precipices," Mr. Lorton exlaimed, "I rather agree with them; but for goodness' sake let us see what is to be seen, and leave the Romans alone."

What was to be seen happened to be some pieces of tessellated pavement in very good preservation, and mounds of grass which had once been fortifications. These remains were glanced at; and "how queer!" "how pretty!" and "is that all?" were the exclamations of those of the party who had never been there before. Lady Emma and Lord Carsdown treated the Roman enaampment like an old friend that was not to be too much depreciated, nor yet too much made of. It was one of the chief sights in the neighbourhood, and all their guests ought to see it.

"Wonderful people, certainly, the Romans were!" Mr. Lorton exclaimed, as they sat down again in the carriage, in the tone of a person who thinks it necessary to say something civil. The drive home was very dull to one half of the party. Mrs. Harper had no more questions to ask. Mr. Lorton endeavoured to ascertain Lady Emma's opinions on every possible subject, religious, political, and social—in order to agree with her entirely and to make some foolish remark on each in turn; and she practised that weary labour, which she was preparing to assume for life, of making that appear sensible or at least plausible by her answers and interpretations, which in itself was vapid and foolish. Sometimes they were at cross pur

poses. She had once to pull him up very suddenly, when he had mistaken her strong sense of the necessity of securing for women employment in various lines for a desire they should take degrees and become doctors and lawyers ; and because she did not see why they should not have votes, he jumped to the conclusion that she hoped one day to sit in Parliament. "What admirable speeches you would make, Lady Emma," he enthusiastically exclaimed. "I thought so the other day when you were addressing the Sunday-school children."

"My ambition does not extend so far," she said quickly. "Public speaking and preaching are not within a woman's province. Our duty is to influence, to urge, to stir up men to the fulfilment of their obligations."

"Exactly so. That is just how I understand it. I have always felt that if I was stirred up and urged, I could do anything."

"The evils that surround us are so rampant that, unless desperate efforts are made by every class of the community to stem the progress of infidelity and vice, we must fall into the abyss."

"Of course we must—like that Roman who plunged into it. The encampment makes me think of him."

Lady Emma reddened. Some women would have passed over an admirer's blunder, but that was not in Lady Emma's nature: she must set him right at all costs. "It was to save his country that Curtius sprang into the abyss, and we are all hurrying on to destruction."

"Of course we are. It is a melancholy fact," Mr. Lorton sighed.

"But we may yet be saved," she resumed, "if the Church and the nation join together to resist the torrent."

"Oh, of course, the Church and the nation are everything."

"But we have to fight on one side against the inroads of Popery, and on the other against dissent and infidelity—and now unfortunately against infidelity within the Church as well as without it."

"That is the worst of it," ejaculated Mr. Lorton. "Traitors in the camp."

"And deserters also," Lady Emma added. "Men who pervert their talents in the cause of error, and abandon the Church of England out of wanton impatience and confidence in their own judgment."

"Ah, indeed, clever men are very mischievous. I never trust a clever man," exclaimed Mr. Lorton, with an energy which reminded Ita of one of Mr. Hendon's stories, the colloquy between the witty Madame de Coigny and an old French emigré.

"Ah, Madame! Ce sont les gens d'esprit qui ont perdu la France." "Et pourquoi donc, Monsieur," she exclaimed; "ne l'avez vous pas sauvée?"

On arriving at home, Ita went immediately in search of Annie, whom she had seen very little of that day. She found her just returned from her expedition, but looking very thoughtful. "Have you had a pleasant drive, Annie?" she said, sitting down by her side, and putting her arm round her waist.

"Yes; Grantley Manor is a pretty place."

"I hope you like Mrs. Sydney?"

"I don't see anything wonderful about her. I like Mr. Sydney, but I wish they had not become Roman Catholics."

"Do not let us talk about that, Annie. We do not feel alike about it."

"No, and that is why I am vexed. I know that woman was getting round you last night. I could see it all the time you were talking to her. I saw in your

face you were speaking about something that interested you, and I am sure it was that—you cannot deny it."

"No; I do not want to deny it. But, Annie, if she thinks her religion is the true one, ought she not to wish everybody to belong to it?"

"Wish is all very well, but she has no business to meddle with people."

"She did not begin talking about it. I did; but if she had, I cannot see where would be the harm."

"I do; it is wrong to unsettle people's minds."

"As to that, people's minds are so unsettled just now, they hear such different things from their own clergymen, that I cannot see that there is much danger of what you call unsettling them. Why should it unsettle me more to hear what Mrs. Sydney and the Roman Catholics believe, than what that clergyman I went to hear in London at Wells Street believes, or, when I come down here, what your own Mr. Pratt teaches. I am sure there is much more difference between that 'High Church' preacher's doctrines and Mr. Pratt's, than between what the Puseyites say and what the Roman Catholics believe."

"We all, belong to one Church, and that is all I care about. I hate controversy. People ought to be left alone and not tampered with. Mrs. Sydney was talking with Aunt Gerald of the proselytizers in Ireland, and complaining of their meddling with the poor Roman Catholics. Why should Roman Catholics meddle with Protestants?"

"In the first place, in Ireland the peasants are bribed to leave the religion they believe in, and their poverty is taken advantage of in an unfair manner. So I have heard Mr. Hendon say. In the next place, Annie, I do not think that any one has a right to urge another person to adopt his religion unless he is perfectly certain, entirely sure, that it is the true one, and

that he believes the Church he belongs to is infallible. That seems to me to make the whole difference between a Catholic and a Protestant seeking to convert others. Now you, Annie, I do not speak of myself, because I know I am quite puzzled, and really do not know what to think on the subject; but can you, for instance, say *positively* that you are convinced that Mr. Pratt's teaching is the true one, and that what Mr. Derwent believes is false?"

"I have already told you that I do not want to make up my mind about it. I hope both are right enough to be saved."

"Very well; but then how could you go and try to make Roman Catholics join a Church which teaches in one of its churches one thing, and exactly the contrary in another. You say you hope enough truth is taught in both to save a person's soul, and you think the same about Roman Catholics, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then of course you must leave them alone."

"I am sure they are wrong in all sorts of ways, but I don't want to meddle with them. Why, then, should they meddle with us."

"Why, Annie, if you saw a person losing his way when it was most important for him to reach quickly a place of safety, would it be right and kind not to meddle with him, not to tell him at least which you were certain was the right road, though you might think that possibly by scrambling through briars and getting over dangerous fences he might perhaps arrive at the place of shelter."

"I might be mistaken as to the road."

"If you had a doubt on the subject then, I suppose you would be right not to advise him which way to go. But if you were sure . . . ."

"I'll tell you what, Ita, I will not talk to you any

more about these subjects. You are cleverer than I am, you have read much more than I have, and talked with Mr. Hendon, who seems a strange kind of Protestant, who says everything in favour of Roman Catholics, though he is not one himself. When Edgar comes here, or at all events at Holmwood, you can argue with him—he will be able to answer you."

"But then it will be by an entirely different set of arguments, because you and Mr. Derwent, who thinks, I suppose like Miss Conway, differ almost as much as you and Mrs. Sydney."

"That is nonsense. People who belong to the same Church cannot really differ very much."

"Oh, Annie, I must get some of the numbers of the 'Church Times' and the 'Union' out of Lady Emma's room, that you may see what they say about Protestants and Protestantism."

"I do not want to see them. Lady Emma hates Popery as much as anybody. She says Mr. and Mrs. Sydney have committed a great sin by becoming Roman Catholics; she will hardly speak to them."

"Oh, that is too absurd, too inconsistent," Ita exclaimed; "if she goes abroad, she thinks it right to go to the Roman Catholic churches, where the priests all teach that the Anglicans do not belong at all to the Catholic Church, and are living in schism and heresy. If the Holy Ghost guides the Church and teaches in it, how can it teach one thing in one place and another in another?"

"You only puzzle and teaze me, Ita, by going on in this way. I will not have any more conversations of this sort with you."

"Dearest Annie, I did not begin on this subject. You started by attacking Mrs. Sydney because she talked to me about religion. I only wished to defend her. As to whether she is right or wrong, or her

religion the true one or not, I really do not know. I wish with all my heart I could make up my mind, for even this little bit of the world and society which we are seeing here, makes me feel that it is necessary to have some settled ideas about religion. I am terribly inclined to care more for amusement than anything else. Do you like being here?"

"Pretty well," Annie replied; "not so much as being at home. I fancy Edgar may come to-morrow."

"Oh, really. I long so much to see him."

Annie blushed, and said, "I think you will like him. Everybody does."

"Do you think him more agreeable and pleasing than any of the gentlemen here?"

"Without any comparison," Annie said, quite affronted. "I should be very angry with you for asking that question if you had seen Edgar."

"Sir John Leislip is very agreeable."

Annie shrugged her shoulders.

"And Lord Carsdown and Mr. Bayham are very handsome."

"I don't see that."

"Don't you think they are good-looking?"

"Not in comparison with my cousin Edgar."

"I hope," said Ita laughing, "that I shall not take a dislike to Mr. Derwent, just because I have heard him so much praised. There is a perversity of that sort in human nature you know. Oh! if that is not the dressing-bell. Will you knock at my door as you go down to the drawing-room? How is Mrs. Gerald's head to-day?"

"Better, much; but she is not in good spirits. I cannot make out what is the matter with her."

"I am afraid I did something last night, which must have displeased your aunt. I said I was so fond of her. I do not know why she should have been offended;

and she had been so kind to me just before; but ever since her manner has become cold to me."

"Aunt Gerald is very changeable about some things, and I have observed that she is particularly so about you. I never feel sure whether you are a favourite with her or not."

"I want her so much to like me."

"Why?"

"I hardly know."

"Well, you must try and be satisfied with my liking you, which I do, though you are very tiresome about some things."

Ita laughed and ran away to dress. The ball was to take place the following evening. In the morning there came a note of excuse from Edgar Derwent to Lady Carsdale, and a letter from him to Mrs. Gerald, in which he said that he could not bring himself to leave London at that moment for the sake of any pleasure, however great, and that in any case, such a scene of gaiety as that at Carsdale would not harmonize with his feelings at a time when he was looking forward to the solemn act he was so soon to accomplish; but that he hoped to pay another visit to Holmwood in October; and again he alluded in a delicate manner to the hopes which he cherished, and which he was now aware she allowed him to entertain, at least as far as her own wishes were concerned. Mrs. Gerald in her answer to his last letter had spoken in a manner which warranted him fully in thus expressing himself.

Annie was disappointed at finding that she should not see Edgar till October, but on the whole was not sorry that he did not come to Carsdale. Her sense of what was right made her see the propriety of his feeling on the subject, and then, just in the state of things between them, it was not in the midst of a large party that she would have liked to meet him again.

In the course of the day arrived Lady Octavia and Miss Berwick, Mrs. Hurst and her daughters, Mr. Harman, and several young men, whose chief merit was supposed to be their love of dancing.

Mrs. Hurst was Lady Carsdale's greatest friend. It was to her she confided her few little grievances. The fuss Lord Carsdale made because one of his horses had broken its knee; the fuss Lady Emma made because those poor dear Sydneys had changed their religion; the fuss the housekeeper made because the new set of china had not arrived from London: these drawbacks to her peace of mind were dwelt on with a serenity and unconquerable cheerfulness which contrasted with Mrs. Hurst's melancholy sympathy. She did not know how to be sorry enough for the broken knee, the strange conduct of the Sydneys, or the carelessness of the tradesman who did not send the china; but she was still more sorry that dear Lord Carsdale, and dear Lady Emma, and poor Mrs. Price, took these misfortunes so much to heart, and it was so sad for dearest Lady Carsdale to be so worried in the midst of her party, and when she must have so much on her mind. One glance at her friend's beaming countenance ought to have reassured her, but Mrs. Hurst revelled in soothing imaginary sufferings. Her daughters were as healthy, as merry, and as light-hearted girls as could be seen, but she never spoke of them but as "poor dear Fanny," and "my poor Theresa;" and the happiest events drew from her expressive sighs and pitiful ejaculations.

"Mamma," Lord Carsdown had once disrespectfully said to his mother, "you and Mrs. Hurst are 'Jean qui rit' and 'Jean qui pleure.' I like the first Jean much the best."

"Do not say anything against Mrs. Hurst, my poor dear boy. She is the greatest comfort in the world to me."

"I do not breathe a syllable against her, only I had rather be your son than hers. She has a way of sighing over me on every occasion which depresses my spirits."

Ita found it extremely agreeable to make so many new acquaintances. When the dancing began that evening, all the gentlemen seemed anxious to engage her. Before any of the neighbours arrived, she had partners enough in prospect for the whole evening. The Miss Hursts were amiable, good-humoured girls, and, though they did not say much that was worth hearing, it was all very pleasant as far as it went. As to Miss Berwick, she changed her mind about her three times at least in the course of as many hours. The first impression was very unfavourable; she was dressed in the extreme of the fashion, and there was something bold and free in her manner which went against Ita's ideas of good taste. She could not help thinking she painted, and her hair was of a colour that hardly could be natural. Perhaps Ita would have been too inexperienced to observe this, if Lord Carsdown, who had again sat next to her at dinner, had not pointed it out. When the ladies were in the drawing-room afterwards, Miss Berwick gave a glance at the younger ones, and instantly fixed upon Ita as the one most likely to enable her to pass the next half-hour without being too much bored. They had been introduced to each other previously, and she came and sat by her. Though rather disposed to draw back from any approach to intimacy, Ita, whose foible it was to like to please, could not help being flattered at being thus singled out. It is seldom that a girl of her age is not gratified by the notice of one older and more used to society than herself. She could not help being very much amused by Miss Berwick's talk; it could hardly be called conversation. She was droll,

she was daring, she was unscrupulous in the things she said; they were not, perhaps, quite in keeping with good taste and good feeling, and yet it would have been difficult to define how, and when, and to what degree they were objectionable. Later in the evening, and when the dancing began, Ita was still an object of attention to her new acquaintance, who evidently wished it to be understood that she was the only woman of the party whom she cared to associate with.

There is always some excitement in anything like danger, and this is unfortunately the case even in a moral point of view. From what is decidedly bad those who are good shrink; but from what is questionable they do not always recoil, and even find a sort of charm in the society of those who venture to say, out of honesty they declare, what sounds startling—this sort of affectation of candour, this recklessness, a tolerably well-studied recklessness however, is one of the most dangerous snares with which people delude themselves and others. The semblance of humility—notwithstanding Professor Porson's famous adage—and the assumption of sensibility, which was the prevalent affectation in the society of the last century, were more creditable than the cynical truthfulness which some people now display. It is better to pretend to be amiable than to be brutal. But the very novelty of this sort of freedom of manner and style of language to a girl educated in different habits of mind, excites a sort of interest such as is felt on a first acquaintance with a foreign country. People who say without reserve anything that comes into their heads must be rather amusing if they are not very tiresome. Ita was rather amused by Miss Berwick's funny ways, as she called them. She found her a more amusing companion than Lady Emma, and consequently lost ground very

rapidly in the latter's good opinion, who took an opportunity of saying to Annie, that she was sorry to see Miss Flower had taken a fancy to that very objectionable girl. She should not have thought that she was the sort of person to be captivated by anybody so *mauvais genre*, but that she began to see what was her character.

"One evening she was engrossed by Mrs. Sydney's exciting talk about religion, and making her believe she was ready to become a Roman Catholic; and the next as amused as possible with the slang and give-and-take style of that Miss Berwick's conversation. Depend upon it," she added, "she is a person who will always go into extremes, and I feel convinced now, that in a year's time your little friend will be either a Papist or as fast as Miss Berwick herself."

"L'un n'empêche pas l'autre," ejaculated Mrs. Harper, who was following them; "for the Berwicks are Catholics."

"Really? Mamma never told me so!" Lady Emma exclaimed, half displeased at not having been previously informed of the fact, but glad that the fast young lady should turn out to be a Papist. She felt, and perhaps justly, that Miss Berwick's dress and manners might do away with much of the favourable impression Mrs. Sydney might have created in favour of her creed. For the first time since the latter's conversion Lady Emma volunteered to go and sit by the latter, with no other purpose apparently than to put a question relative to her coreligionist, which implied surprise at her worldly ideas and questionable manners. Mrs. Sydney felt inwardly pained, but said quietly, "Dear Lady Emma, I am quite as sorry as you could wish about it, but I have one consolation: I feel more hope that the paint and the false hair, which shock you so much, may be one day discarded, and the whole tone of that

poor girl's mind changed, than you perhaps would have, if you saw a Protestant give way to those follies. There is a power of recovery in our religion, which does not, I think, exist in yours. Protestants often keep on a height; but if they fall seldom regain their footing."

"I assure you, Mrs. Sydney, you are mistaken. Numbers of girls who once led worldly, or sometimes worse than worldly lives, enter our sisterhoods."

"Perhaps so. But it is not the Protestant religion which forms sisterhoods; you imitate us—you borrow from us without, indeed, paying interest or giving security, and time will show whether the profits are real and lasting. But whatever the results may be, you must own that the religious life is not the offspring of Protestantism."

"Certainly not. We dislike Protestantism quite as much as you do."

With something made up of a smile and a sigh, Mrs. Sydney heard that assertion.

"This is not the moment to discuss that point," she said; "but I should very much like to talk it over quietly with you some other time."

"Oh, I always avoid controversy!" Lady Emma replied, and, crossing the room, joined Lady Rockcastle, and said in an aggrieved voice, "The worst of Roman Catholics is that they always want to get one into an argument and throw things in one's teeth!"

Meanwhile the dancing was actively going on. Ita, even in the midst of her enjoyment of what was quite a new pleasure, rather longed to be sitting by Mrs. Sydney. Amused as she was with Miss Berwick, and pleased at the consciousness of being a general favourite, and more asked to dance than any one else, she felt there was as much difference between the sort of liking she had for her new acquaintance, and that

she felt for Mrs. Sydney, as between the admiration one might have for a comic song or an exquisite poem. She resolved to try and see more of the latter the next day; she wanted to get her to tell her all the history of her sister, and she did hope before they parted that she would ask her to Grantley Manor.

Annie had been making friends with the Miss Hursts, and Mr. Harman had devoted himself to Mrs. Gerald. He had travelled a great deal, and most people thought him agreeable; but he did possess the peculiarity Lady Emma had mentioned, he was too full of his own thoughts to attend much to those of others. Perhaps there was a likeness between him and Mrs. Gerald in this respect—only the difference was, that he poured out his thoughts, and that she kept hers to herself. He spoke of the East, and of Egypt, and of languages, and of tribes, while she watched every look and motion of the two young girls under her care. Once Ita came and stood quite close to her. She was flushed with exercise and excitement, her hair falling down on her shoulders, and her lovely face looking really beautiful. Mr. Harman had not taken notice of her before, he then asked who she was. When Mrs. Gerald had answered his question, he exclaimed, "You don't say so! Then that is the very little girl I saw at Lady Emily's some sixteen years ago. She had just adopted her—a formal proceeding abroad, which both parties are obliged to abide by. To be sure, what a pretty creature she is! Miss Flower, you say she is called. I remember there was a great debate as to the name they would give her. 'Fior del Mare' was proposed, and then Margarita—Pearl of the Sea. She was a wonderfully engaging child. Lady Emily, after her husband's death, sank into a sort of melancholy which nothing could rouse her from. Mr. Hendon bethought himself of borrowing this little girl to amuse her, and

she took such a fancy to the young lady that it ended by her adopting her. We were great friends at that time—Margarita and I. We must renew acquaintance. Ita she used to call herself."

"Who was she?"

"She came from a village between San Remo and Mentone. Very poor people, I believe, had brought her up. Some difficulty was made about her religion, I remember. They said she was to be a *buona Christiana*. Lady Emily said, 'Yes, of course she would be educated a good Christian,' and there the matter ended. Will you introduce me to Miss Flower?"

"Ita!" Mrs. Gerald said, in a low voice. Immediately the young girl turned round with a pleased, eager look, as if the very sound of Mrs. Gerald's voice gave her pleasure. "Here is a gentleman who knew you years ago, and wishes to be introduced to you."

Ita looked at Mr. Harman with her ingenuous bright expression. She did not, of course, recollect him at first; but suddenly it flashed upon her that he was the kind, good-natured man who used to play with her in those early days at Mentone when she first lived with Lady Emily. She was delighted at this reminiscence, and felt quite sorry to be hurried away by her partner.

As he sat down again he said, "She is charming, that little lady, but not at all like an Italian. What a pretty way she has of speaking, with just the slightest possible foreign accent."

"Did you ever see her before she came to Lady Emily?"

"No; I did not."

"Used she ever to go and see her family?"

"I think not. It was made, I believe, one of the conditions of the adoption."

"There is something very unnatural in that arbitrary severance of natural ties."

"I remember hearing something about her being a child picked up at sea. Somebody, speaking of her, said she had been picked up in the street by Lady Emily, and the answer was 'No, not in the street.' I think the story was that she had been found, like a little Moses, floating in her cradle, by some fishermen, who had taken her home. I wonder if she knows herself anything about it."

Mrs. Gerald made no answer; but when Mr. Harman, an instant afterwards, began speaking to her about the sources of the Nile, she could not even pretend to attend to him. Her abstraction was so great, that it forced itself even on his notice, and he was obliged, as soon as possible, to look out for another listener.

Ita had seen a great deal of Mrs. Sydney on the last day of their visit; they had walked round the grounds together, and had some further conversation about religion. She had been invited, as she wished, to Grantley Manor, but was afraid that Lady Emily would not be able to spare her again for a long time. She heard all the story of Mrs. Neville's sufferings, her secret marriage, her fidelity to her faith under the most trying circumstances, her reconciliation with her husband, and her death which soon followed. It was a romantic story, and one calculated to make an impression on the mind of an enthusiastic young girl. All her predilection at that time for the Catholic religion was founded on romance—on the beauty of its worship, and the picturesque associations connected with it. She longed to see the chapel of Grantley Manor, because it would remind her of her favourite churches abroad, and because there is something poetical in the historical traditions of English Catholicism. She had, at the same time, met with a person, whose character, looks, and manners had singularly attracted her, and,

for the first days after her return to Marchbanks, she thought much more of Mrs. Sydney than of any other person she had made acquaintance with that week; even than of Sir John Leislip, whom she had liked very much, and who had seemed to like her in a way which might have made a deeper impression upon her, if there had been more time on both sides for better acquaintance. Her return to Marchbanks was gloomy enough. It seemed very flat and uninteresting to spend the evenings alone with Lady Emily and Mr. Hendon: for, though the latter was a clever man, he did not think it worth while to make himself agreeable in domestic life; and Lady Emily's feeble health, and want of interest in everything a young person would naturally care for, was painfully distressing to her adopted child. In a different and inferior sense, Ita experienced the feeling thus described by St. Teresa, "I seemed as one who had a great treasure, and who was desirous that all should share in it, and yet my hands seemed tied as if to prevent me from distributing it." Thoughts came to her which she longed to impart to others; there was in her heart a deep power of loving, which as yet had found no object; a superabundance of activity, mental and bodily, perpetually seeking for exercise. She seemed, morally speaking, to wander through desert places and to find no rest.

To Annie, on the contrary, it was an unmitigated delight to be at home again, and the weeks which intervened between her return from Carsdale, and Edgar's visit in October, were full of sweetness. She had had a glimpse of the world, and had convinced herself how little she cared for it. She had seen other young men, and had been able to judge of what she had never doubted, and that was, that Edgar was superior even to those who were generally acknowledged to be pleasing and agreeable. His letters to Mrs. Gerald, parts of

which her aunt read aloud to her, showed more and more with what true religious feelings he was entering on his new career, and though there was much in his enthusiasm and his devotion she could not entirely sympathize with, her admiration for his goodness daily increased. Her mind dwelt continually on the thought that he was soon coming—coming, she hoped, to propose to her—and that she had it in her power to make him happy—happy in every way; to make her home his home; to give him the means of carrying out his dearest wishes; to please him; to see him smile, that smile which since her earliest childhood she had never seen on his face without delight. Annie really loved nobody in the world very much but him, and it was a quiet, great deep happiness that they would spend their lives together in that place which she was about to make him master of. It was well that she had so many pleasant thoughts to dwell upon, and that she enjoyed solitary rambles and evenings by herself in the drawing-room, for Mrs. Gerald was very much out of spirits, and, which she had never known her before, strangely irritable. She stayed for hours together locked up in her room, and Annie found it hard to please her, especially with regard to anything that had to do with Marchbanks. If she proposed to go there, or to ask Ita to come to them, Mrs Gerald generally looked annoyed, and said, "She really could not see any reason for this violent intimacy." If, on the contrary, Annie said nothing about it, she sometimes hinted at her being changeable, and neglecting those she at moments made such a fuss with. When Ita came, her manner to her was more than ever uncertain. Annie thought this rather provoking; but she was too happy to care much about it. They had, however, one scene which, for a moment, disturbed and annoyed her very much, especially as it led to her uttering a hasty expression

which she deeply regretted, and which offended her aunt more than anything she had ever said or done in her life.

Mrs. Gerald had gone to pay a visit at some distance, and Ita came unexpectedly to spend the afternoon with Annie. They had talked for some time, drank tea in the conservatory, and then Ita happened to say she had never seen the whole of the house.

"Oh, I will take you all over it," Annie exclaimed. "Come upstairs, I will show you my bed-room and dressing-room, and the visitors' rooms, and Aunt Gerald's room too, for she is out."

And so she did; they wandered through the house to their hearts' content, and looked into every nook and corner. As they passed through Mrs. Gerald's room, Annie said, "I must show you my mother's picture."

She drew the curtain aside, and Ita exclaimed, "Oh, what a charming face! and is that you, Annie, when you were a baby?"

"Yes," Annie answered, and then she suddenly exclaimed, "Now I see who you are like! It has always bothered me. You are so like that picture of my mother."

"Am I? Well, I can fancy it from what I have seen of my own face in the glass."

"Let me put a scarf round your head to look like that turban, and arrange your hair in the same way, and then you shall look in the glass and see if the likeness is not striking."

She ran into her room and brought back a blue scarf of the same colour as the turban, which she twisted and arranged on Ita's head, and put on her shoulders a black lace shawl similar to the one in the picture. Then she led her before the pier-glass, and said: "Don't you look exactly like it?"

Just at this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Gerald came into the room. The first thing she saw was Ita's form and face in the glass opposite to her. She gave a scream, and, when the two girls turned round and moved towards her, she was looking deadly pale.

"We have startled you," Annie exciaimed. "I am so sorry. I thought you were out, and I was showing Ita the house."

She kept, as she spoke, undoing the turban, and pulling off the scarf from Ita's shoulders. Mrs. Gerald glanced round the room and saw the curtain drawn aside. Her lips quivered, and laying her hand on Annie's shoulder with a pressure that was almost painful, said with violence: "I cannot forgive you for daring to bring that girl into my room."

Annie was passionate—not easily roused, but capable of being roused to anger, especially by anything like injustice. She saw the burning flush on Ita's cheeks, and her eyes filling with tears, and she said in a tone of indignation, "This is rather hard in my own house!"

Mrs. Gerald fixed her eyes upon her with a strange expression, a wistful, troubled look, in which there was a mixture of tenderness and resentment. As the two girls were leaving the room, she called back Ita, and said in a trembling voice, "It was not your fault—forgive me."

The young girl threw her arms round her neck. Mrs. Gerald seemed as if she was trying to endure the caress for a second, and then shook her off almost roughly. When she was gone, and Mrs. Gerald and Annie met again before dinner, both were very much embarrassed. They had never had anything of a quarrel before, and did not exactly know how to behave to each other. As usual, the one whose affection was the

strongest, and who also felt perhaps that she had been the most in the wrong, made the first advance, and said: "Annie, if I did not love you so much . . . ." there she paused.

"Oh, Aunt Gerald, I ought not to have said those odious words about this being my own house."

"It would have been better not," Mrs. Gerald answered. "You do not know how thoughtless words may wound. I wish you never to take anybody into my room. When you are married I shall leave you, and then you may do as you like. I shall carry away with me the memorials of those who live only in my recollection, and whose likenesses I cannot bear to see you trifle with. God only knows what I have suffered to-day!"

All this seemed strange and exaggerated to Annie. She could ill brook reproaches from one who had so unceasingly worshipped her; and longed more than ever for Edgar's arrival since Mrs. Gerald had ventured to be displeased with her. It would be very trying she thought if her aunt took to being cross, and really she did not know how to act about Ita. She almost wished that November was come, and that she had left Marchbanks. It was so awkward, and those caprices about her so tiresome.

Edgar arrived, and about a week afterwards, just as Annie had wished and planned it, they stood together on a blue and gold evening in October on the terrace—the red and yellow leaves falling to the ground in gentle showers—the robin red-breasts twittering about them, the last roses of summer blossoming on the walls of the old house, the sound of the running water making music in their ears—he told her he loved her, and asked her to marry him. She gave him her hand, and said with a glistening eye and a faltering voice: "It is what I have always wanted. I

have always wished your happiness more than anything else in the world."

"And you care for me, Annie? You will be happy with me?"

"Oh, yes; only too happy," she answered; and they returned to the house engaged to each other.

Mrs. Gerald was very much affected when she heard it was all settled, and of course very glad. But it was a restless sort of happiness. A heavy sense of responsibility seemed to weigh upon her, and she was nervous and almost ill when the arrangements about the marriage came to be discussed. It was agreed that the wedding should not take place till the spring. There were circumstances connected with the property which made it difficult for the settlements to be drawn up in a hurry, and one of the principal trustees had gone abroad for some months. In the meantime Edgar accepted Lord Carsdale's prospective offer of the small living of Bramblemoor, which had hitherto been held in conjunction with his own larger one by the Rector of Carsdale. This gentleman had readily consented to give up this small appendage to his parish in consideration of an arrangement better suited to his convenience, which Lord Carsdale was able to make. He also obligingly appointed Edgar as his curate until such time as he should be in priest's orders, and could take possession of the living.

The church stood in the centre of a straggling hamlet, the cottages of which were scattered over a wide common, inhabited by a wild set of people, almost all Dissenters, whom Edgar told Annie it would take care and labour to bring over to the Church. He intended to reside there till after their marriage, and even then, though Holmwood would of course be their home, he should still devote much of his time to Bramblemoor.

Annie did not object to anything—she was quite contented, quite happy; and she thought, though she said nothing about it, that it would be much better he should pursue all his own plans at Bramblemoor than interfere with Mr. Pratt, whom, above all things, she wished to be left undisturbed during the remainder of his life. She could not judge of doctrines, and, as to practices, what suited one person might not suit another; and she did not, for her part, mind if she said her prayers in a church with flowers and candlesticks on the altar, or in one with a table, with two chairs on each side of it. It was nothing to her if clergymen liked to put on vestments, or to wear a plain black gown. She wished everybody to be good, and, as Mr. Pratt and Edgar were her two ideals of goodness and thought as differently as possible about religion, she could not believe it signified much—the old point she had so often discussed with Eliza Conway—what people did believe. Only on one subject Annie was prejudiced, she could not endure Roman Catholicism. There was a mixture of feelings in this antipathy. First, the strong English idea that the Church of England, the Establishment, whatever it might teach or not teach, do or not do, was the English form of religion which all English people should adhere to. Then, one of Edgar's ideas was that an English clergyman was a priest, and the Roman Catholic Church forbade priests to marry. This fact made his marriage a sort of reflection upon him on the part of that Church, which, with feminine susceptibility, she resented. Her love for Edgar was a peculiar and very deep feeling—that kind of affection which undemonstrative people sometimes have for the one person they really care for—an intense engrossing devotion capable of every sacrifice, but seldom expressed by word or by look, except when any strong emotion calls forth a vehement outburst of

the hidden fire. One of its effects in Annie's case was her growing hatred of the Church of Rome. It had always been the object of Mr. Pratt's aversion, and it was, though in a different way, dreaded and disliked by Edgar. These two reasons arrayed her strongest feelings against it.

Meanwhile, Ita was spending a melancholy autumn at Marchbanks. Lady Emily's strength had so rapidly diminished after a cold she had caught in October, that it was thought impossible for her to travel. When she got a little better, the season was too far advanced to make a journey safe, and the doctors recommended that she should spend the winter in two rooms kept at an even temperature. This arrangement suited Mr. Hendon. He was glad to have his sister-in-law in his house: neither she nor Ita interfered with his comfort, or took up his time. Ita was the only one to whom this change of plans proved to be a great disappointment. She longed for the south, for sunny Mentone, its blue bays, its lovely valleys, and its orange and olive woods, with a strong yearning; she pined for the churches, and chapels, and crosses, and all the outward symbols of religion, which she had been accustomed to all her life, and which she loved with an ignorant, unreasoning fondness. For she knew nothing of the truths symbolized by these objects: she did not understand why she felt a peculiar feeling of awe and consolation when she knelt in a Catholic Church, or why certain words and certain blessings seemed to have a mysterious effect upon her. She had no conscious faith in the Real Presence, and yet at the elevation during Mass and when Benediction was given, it had always seemed to her as if a heavenly dew refreshed her soul. And she yearned to feel all this again. She longed for the beauty of earth, sea and sky; for her morning walks, in the early dawn, to

the Annunziata, the beautiful little sanctuary of the hills, in the midst of a smiling desert. For Lagheto, the monastery where thousands and thousands of peasants flock every year from every point of the Riviera, to ask for favours or to bring their simple *ex votos*. She longed to hear again the litanies and hymns of the poor women in the cathedral of San Michele—untutored strains which have proceeded from the hearts and lips of generation after generation of simple pious souls, whose lives were as pure as their own skies, till the inroads of civilization, falsely called progress, made its way among them with its accursed train of luxury and vice. Yes, Ita longed to get away from the clouds, the cold, the dulness of an English winter. Everything in and about Marchbanks appeared to her at that moment uninteresting and unprofitable. She had nothing to do, no cares and no occupations. Mrs. Gerald's capricious conduct spoilt the pleasure of her visits to Holmwood, nor was Annie, though she liked her very much, quite a congenial companion. She did not see the least prospect of going to Grantley Manor; Lady Emily required just enough of her attention to prevent her being able to leave home, and yet took up very little of her time, which consequently often hung heavy on her hands. For even reading does not suffice to fill up the hours of a long day, or to satisfy the impetuous cravings of an ardent spirit. And as to religion, what was there in Protestantism to compare with the beauty of the glimpses she had had from without of the inward loveliness of the Catholic Church abroad, the crumbs which she had gathered here and there from its rich stores of love, faith, and hope? The one Sunday service, in the dreariest little ugly parish church imaginable—the prayers read in a pompous tone, and responded to by a clerk with a nasal twang—psalm-

singing of the most depressing and monotonous sort —a dull sermon read by a dull preacher!

She felt saddened and depressed beyond description by this pure Protestant form of worship, and her only comfort was the idea that began to dawn in her mind that one day—when, how soon, where, how, she knew not—she must be a Catholic. It was an idea that enabled her to endure the present, it was something to hold on to. She clung to this thought like a person in a dangerous position grasps a rope which, if the case becomes more desperate, may afford a hope of safety. Many hold this spiritual rope in their hand for years, so long that their grasp of it grows feeble, and at last the hand becomes paralyzed, and loses its power over it. Then the crisis comes—one of those turning-points when there can be no standing still, when an advance must be made or a retrograde step taken. God help, in that hour, those who have let go the resolution they had made, who have allowed the rope to slacken till it has escaped from their hold! It will be a signal mercy if, in the decisive hour, they do not sever themselves for ever from the haven they had once hoped to make.

Edgar was obliged to absent himself from Holmwood almost the whole of November, but early in December he was to take possession of the cottage he meant to make his home at Bramblemoor. Annie had quite neglected Ita during the days he had been at Holmwood after their marriage was settled, but after his departure, they met oftener again, and she told her of her engagement. The tidings had already reached Marchbanks, and also the news that Edgar was to be curate at Bramblemoor, and eventually have the living. Ita knew the place very well. The little village, the picturesque common, the clusters of cottages belonging to the parish, but widely separated from one another,

had often attracted her notice. The inhabitants of these sheds, or cabins, for they were hardly anything better, had originally been squatters on the common, and had gradually taken possession of these tenements, which Lord Carsdale permitted them to occupy at a merely nominal rent. Some of them were of gipsy extraction, others had once been poachers, many of them were only the poorest of the poor,—neglected, wild, uncared-for beings, who lead the nearest approach to a savage life possible in a civilized, old world country. It was strange how long and how entirely they had been unnoticed. A small Independent Methodist chapel existed on one side of the common, the furthest from the village of Bramblemoor; some of the squatters frequented it, others did not go to any place of worship. There was a small church in the village, but no resident clergyman; the service had only been occasionally performed by the Rector of Marchbanks. But Lady Emma Cars had entreated her father to repair the church, and had superintended these reparations herself. She gave herself up with ardour to this employment, going over there several times a week, to watch and direct the progress of the work. The plans had been drawn up in strict accordance with proper ecclesiastical architecture; beautiful glass windows designed—the altar, with a cross upon it, placed duly in the eastern direction, an elaborately carved font, given by Lady Emma herself, near the entrance, and every detail carefully studied, so as to exhibit as near an approach as possible to the appearance of a Catholic church, and yet not to infringe the letter of the law or the direct prohibitions of the bishop of the diocese: for some years ago these dignitaries of the Church of England were not quite so openly defied, disobeyed, and scouted by the self-termed Catholic portion of their flocks, as is now the case.

This church was really a very pretty one; and, when it was nearly completed, Lady Emma's next object was to get her father to induce the Rector of Marchbanks to give up this small living, and to bestow it upon a churchman of the highest and, she added, the soundest Church principles. Lord Carsdale, who was himself rather broad church than anything else—at least in so much that he carried the good-nature which belonged to his character into religious questions, and would have gladly included in the pale of the Establishment Mohammedans and Pagans, if they had desired—was quite willing to agree to what his daughter wished. She urged that those scattered wild people on the common ought to be Christianized, and that a resident clergyman alone could undertake that work, and that, as it was most important the services should be attractive, it was necessary to appoint one who would promote chanting, and carry out church principles.

"Very well, Em, look out for one," her father dutifully replied, in a tone befitting an age when children often think it their business to be spiritual directors to their parents. And so Lady Emma turned the subject over in her mind with no little anxiety, and corresponded about it with Eliza Conway, who immediately suggested Mr. Derwent. She thought nothing could be better than his beginning at Bramblemoor what he would carry on at Holmwood whenever Mr. Pratt departed this life. Lady Emma objected that when Mr. Derwent was married to his cousin he would not reside at Bramblemoor, and to have a resident clergyman was the chief object in view. Miss Conway replied that he was not going to be married for some months, that he would subsequently, no doubt, appoint a curate, who would, when he left, act under his directions and in his spirit—that the poverty of the people

among whom the work had to be carried on made it desirable that their clergyman should have some means of assisting them; all sorts of charities would have to be founded, and if once Edgar Derwent took charge of the parish, he and Annie would always take an interest in it. There arguments were rather cogent. Lady Emma hesitated, however, a little about appointing or making her papa appoint, which came to the same thing, a married, or to be married, clergyman. There were floating ideas in her mind as to the higher perfection of the single state; but then there was this important consideration, unmarried High Church clergymen were more easily susceptible of being perverted to Rome. A wife was a great safeguard, though unfortunately not an absolute preservative, from Popery. This consideration decided her, the living was offered to and accepted by Edgar.

Such an opening for active, zealous work was most acceptable to him at that moment. He was preparing to take upon himself sacred duties—to devote himself to what he thought the highest calling. He was also preparing to enter a state of life which some persons, even in his own communion, deemed not perfectly in accordance with that high calling, and he wished to prove to himself, far more than to others, that there was nothing in those bright prospects of human happiness and prosperity which militated against his intention of devoting himself most ardently to apostolic labour. He rejoiced in the thought of taking up his abode, for a while at least, in this poor little village, among those ignorant people, and of leading Annie to share with him all the interests and the occupations which were to be for ever interwoven with their married life. Those months would be a sort of preparation for future usefulness. Visions of future self-renouncement, of wealth devoted to the spiritual

and temporal welfare of others, of a holy simplicity which would be all the more meritorious because it would be voluntary, floated in his mind and deepened his enthusiasm.

Whether Annie perfectly understood, or perfectly shared, these aspirations might seem a little doubtful. She did so certainly so far as this, that she would never object to anything he wished or which would make him happy; the pleased look with which she listened to his plans, and the delight she took in his enjoyment of these schemes, made him imagine that she was as eager about them as himself. To Ita she used to say exactly the truth: "If Edgar were to like me to go and live at Bramblemoor, in that ugly little cottage he has taken, I would. But I hope he never will wish it."

CHAPTER VII.

It was a few days before Christmas, the season was a particularly mild one. There were roses in the gardens, and actually primroses in the woods. The air had a strange softness; the pale northern sun was shining through the painted glass windows, on the tesselated pavement of the little church of Bramblemoor, and shedding its faint light on the green graves of the churchyard, on the vast expanse of the neighbouring common, and the clumps of fir-trees and holly bushes which dotted its surface.

Edgar Derwent had lately taken possession of his small house. It was scarcely better than a labourer's cottage; the furniture was poor; one old woman he had engaged as cook and housekeeper, and a young savage under her orders was being trained into an errand boy, or rather a boy-of-all-work. There was scarcely a mark of distinction about the place except a tolerably large number of books, almost more than the place would hold, on the shelves of the sitting-room and his own bed-room, and several beautiful religious engravings and prints, which hung on the walls. He was standing before a table covered with flowers, which had been brought in by the children he had already gathered together under the care of a dame competent to teach them the alphabet, and not to fight, at least within the walls of the awful edifice, dignified by the name of school, a sort of outhouse of his own abode. It was a Saturday, and he wanted to have a cross of

flowers and wreaths prepared for the decoration of his church the next day, St. Thomas's Feast. He was hesitating whether to ask his cook or his schoolmistress to undertake the task, when Annie drove up to the door in her pony-chaise, and Ita with her. He came to the door with a bright smile on his pale, thin, but very handsome face, and exclaimed: "Why, Annie, you are come just in time to help me." Then, as she said, "Miss Flower, Edgar," he bowed to the other young lady, and helped them both out of the carriage. When they came into his little sitting-room, Annie exclaimed, "What a number of flowers! What *are* you going to do with them?"

"I want wreaths for the church. I want it to look very pretty to-morrow. I have gone round to a great many of the cabins on the common, and made people promise to come to church, who have not been into one for years."

"Do you think they will care about flowers?" Annie asked.

"Oh, I am sure they will," Ita exclaimed.

Edgar smiled: "I suppose then that you are fond of them yourself: I mean, that you like to see them in a church."

"Oh, yes. I was glad to hear that even in Marchbanks Church there will be holly at Christmas. I do so long to see something there besides the pews, the reading-desk, and the green baize on the communion table."

"It is as ugly a church as can be seen," Annie said, "but I wonder if we could help Edgar about these wreaths?"

"The worst of it is that I wanted to go to the other side of the common this afternoon to look up some more people, and I thought you would like to walk with me. You could have your pony put up in the farm stable for a couple of hours."

"I should like it very much, but then your wreaths?"

"Annie," Ita said, in a low voice, "could not I make the wreaths while you walk with Mr. Derwent? I should like it so much. I made very pretty ones at Mentone."

"I know you arrange them beautifully. May she stay here, Edgar, and I will go with you."

"It is very kind of you, Miss Flower," Edgar said; "but are you quite sure it will not bore you?"

"Not in the least. I shall like it so much. And if I have not enough, may I get some more flowers out of your garden. I see a few left."

"Yes," he said, laughingly. "Take them all if you like. We cannot expect they will last long now, and on Christmas Day we shall fall back on our traditional holly."

The pony-chaise was put up, and Annie and Edgar went off to the common, looking very happy. Ita began her work. She drew the table nearer to the window that she might see the moor, and one particular holly-bush which she had taken a fancy to from the moment she had looked out of that window. The sky was particularly pretty, too, that afternoon. She had not felt, since she had been in England, so pleased with any scenery, not even the beauties of Holmwood or Carsdale, as with that bit of wild landscape, or set about anything with so much pleasure as making these wreaths. She finished them in about an hour and a half, and then strolled into the village, and on to the little church, the door of which was open. She was surprised at the beauty of the inside. The painted glass was exceedingly pretty, and the tesselated pavement also. The communion table really looked like an altar; there was a picture of the Crucifixion above it, and the whole aspect and arrangement of the building

was altogether different from the cold bare churches she had hitherto seen in English villages. She sat down on one of the front benches, and took up a book which was lying there. It was a manual of prayers and devotions, extracted from Catholic authors, and adapted to the use of the English Church. A smaller volume contained a preparation for Confession and Communion, modelled on those she had seen abroad. She was absorbed in examining these books when a slight touch on the shoulder startled her. Annie whispered, "We must be going home." She followed her to the door, and there they met Edgar, who had seen the wreaths and was delighted with them. He expressed his gratitude and pleasure very warmly. She told him she had been looking at some of his books, and he offered to lend them to her. Annie had been talking to him, during their walk, of Ita's Catholic tendencies, and her conversation with Mrs. Sydney. He had eagerly promised to use his best efforts to keep her in the Anglican Church, and felt convinced he should succeed. The minute he had seen her he perceived that she was no ordinary person; that she was worth taking pains with.

"We must not lose her," he said to Annie.

She smiled and said, "It will be a struggle between you and Mrs. Sydney."

"No, dear Annie," he answered. "No—it will be a struggle between the power of fascination in the Roman Church, so dangerous to warm hearts and imaginative minds, and the holy, quiet influences of our own Church, which, if religiously accepted, gently mould the character and discipline the soul. From what you tell me of your friend, Protestantism could never gain or retain any hold on her mind; but when she understands that our Church is thoroughly Catholic, though not Roman, I hope it will be quite a new light to her."

Though Annie had said they were to go home, none of the party were in a hurry to separate. The two girls sat down on the stile at one end of the little churchyard listening to Edgar's plans and hopes. It was a new thing to Ita to hear anyone speak as Edgar did—he was so earnest, so deeply earnest. As he dwelt on what he had already been able to do amongst the poor people, and of the feelings with which he was striving and praying for their conversion, her heart burnt within her. She longed to help him in more important ways than by making wreaths; and, for the first time, there rose in her mind thoughts of what life might be with a great aim and a great work. She admired him very much. In the prime of youth, and engaged to be married to one who evidently idolized him, as Annie did—his whole heart and soul seemed engrossed by the intense desire of winning to God some of these poor, sinful, ignorant souls. When they passed the little makeshift for a school, some twenty children came running out and clustered round Edgar, clinging to his coat or catching hold of his hands and knees. He shook them off good-naturedly, and showed his visitors the narrow low room which served for the present as a school. Some pretty Scripture prints hung round it, and there was a large mattress in one corner for babies to sleep upon when tired of learning the alphabet.

"I have a night school here," Edgar said, "and I read aloud amusing books to the young men. I have got seven or eight to come regularly, and I hope to make them into valuable assistants in time. I want to be like that bishop who found seventeen Catholics in his diocese, when he first came to it, and all the rest were heretics; but before he died, all his people were Catholics, save seventeen who remained heretics."

"You want to make these people Catholics?" Ita timidly asked.

"Yes—good, thorough English Catholics. I mean to make them love their Church—delight in her services, and value her sacraments. I have got two or three of the best disposed persons amongst them to come to daily prayers; it is but a small beginning, but I hope in time that, at break of day and at sunset, the whole of my little flock will offer up together the sacrifice of praise and prayer. I have been reading an account of what the Curé of Ars, a small place in France, accomplished in his parish. I mean to make him my model."

Ita coloured deeply. "Do you mean that you take a Catholic priest for your model?"

"Yes, as far as his virtues and his holiness go. I only wish I might hope to emulate them ever so distantly, but I am grateful that my own Church is a purer one than his. It is in her, by her, for her, and through her that I have to work; I thank God for it, and take for my motto that beautiful sentence—the watchword of the Catholic party in England: 'In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength.'"

"Yes, those are beautiful words!" Ita ejaculated, looking very thoughtful.

"They ought to be the motto of those who labour to convince others of the truth."

"I like your church, I mean that little church there, very much. I should like to come and pray there every day."

"Well, at eight in the morning and seven at night we have prayers, and in the evening I give a short instruction. Annie and Mrs. Gerald are coming on Christmas Eve, perhaps you will also?"

"Oh, yes?" Annie exclaimed. "You must come and hear Edgar preach. I should have liked much to

come here to-morrow, but I cannot take the carriage out on Sunday."

"Could not you walk?" Ita quickly asked.

"Oh dear no; Aunt Gerald would not hear of it. We must really be going now, she will wonder what has become of us."

They got into the pony-chaise, and Edgar gave into Ita's hand a little parcel of books. "I think," she said to Annie as they drove off "that you are likely to be very happy. Mr. Derwent looks so good, so clever, and he is so handsome too."

"I almost wish sometimes he was not so much better and nicer than other people, as he is. I am afraid I am not half good enough for him."

"But you can grow more and more good. He will show you the way, and lead you on."

Annie shook her head. "I admire him more than I can say, but I do not feel as if I could keep up with him. I am afraid I shall lag behind."

"How you must have enjoyed walking with him, and hearing him talk to the poor people."

"It was very interesting. They seemed at first to listen only out of civility, but, after he had said a few words, they paid more attention, and I could see that some of them were touched. Most of them promised to come to church."

"Going to church at Bramblemoor must be a very different thing from going to church at Holmwood or Marchbanks."

"Very different indeed. What a number of things Edgar has put up which are not seen elsewhere."

"There is something very nice about it. I never saw a church I liked so much before, that was not a Catholic one."

"But Edgar says ours is the Catholic Church, or, at any rate, a branch of it."

"And do you believe it, Annie?"

"In a sort of way I do; but you know I think he goes a great deal too far?"

"But what is going too far?" Ita exclaimed. "What does it mean? I wish you would not always use those sort of vague expressions. Who shall decide what is far enough and not too far?"

"I have gone too far this way," said Annie, laughing; "and must turn round in this narrow lane. Now, do not talk to me just now. There, have not I done it beautifully? How fond the school children seem of Edgar."

"You must not let him get too fond of Bramblemoor. He would make you forsake Holmwood."

"There is no fear of that; he is so passionately fond of it, and he has been telling me of a plan I like so much. Eliza Conway is engaged, he says, to a clergyman, a Mr. Roland, and when we are married, and he lives at Holmwood, he will make him his curate at Bramblemoor, and then they can marry also and live there. In the meantime she and a friend of hers are coming to live in a cottage and work among the poor and nurse the sick."

"I shall ask to help them. What a different thing life must be with real interests and objects."

"Yes, of course, it must be very nice to do a great deal of good, but I have not any talent for it; I am glad Edgar will manage all our charities. My aunt has done so till now, I always ask her about everything."

Mrs. Gerald had been paying Lady Emily a visit, and waiting for Annie to call and take her home. She came down as soon as Ita told her that she had arrived. She was looking very ill; so much so, that both the girls were struck with her paleness; and she hardly spoke at all during the drive home, though Annie was longing to talk about Edgar and Bramblemoor.

"Would you like to live there?" her aunt asked at last in an absent manner.

"Oh dear no: how could I live there? he has only got a little tiny cottage."

"Poets talk of love in a cottage."

"I do not care about poets. Love in a nice country house is much better. How is Lady Emily?"

"Very feeble, and her mind wanders a little, I think, at times."

Mrs. Gerald became absent again. Poor woman! She was beginning to know what it is to suffer silently, secretly, increasingly; to have an unwelcome, strange, wretched, fanciful fear, haunting the waking hour and the sleepless night, mixing itself with every pleasant image, thrusting itself into each thought of the future, and mingling with it doubt and perplexity.

Ita had carried up to her room the little parcel of books Edgar had given her; and, after dinner, when Lady Emily had fallen asleep and Mr. Hendon had gone to his library, she too went to her study, a little recess in the corner of her room, lighted the candles, and began to examine those books. There must be many amongst us, of those that are now far advanced in age, who remember what an epoch it was in their lives when the various publications of the Oxford school began to be placed in their hands; how, after years of meagre, cold, lifeless, shallow religious observances, diversified perhaps by periodical fits of evangelical fervour or Calvinistic enthusiasm, alternating with vague yearnings and instinctive predilections for the Church of Rome struggled against and repressed indeed, but forcing their way into minds which had come into contact with it; how, after this seeking for rest and finding none, a vision rose before them, a fair fabric, a seemly building, on the gates of which seemed inscribed, "Ye that enter in," not as in Dante's

line, "leave all hope behind," but rather "find the fulfilment of every hope and sacred wish." It was like a dream of beauty and of joy to admit into our souls, our minds, and our prayers, the long-forbidden names and words, which had since childhood rung in our ears like a far distant music, the Catholic Church, the Blessed Virgin, the Festivals, the Fasts, All Saints and All Souls, Matins and Evensong, Confession and Absolution. All that we had heard of and gazed on with a sigh as lovely but dangerous visions, what every teacher of our youth and every clergyman of the Protestant Church of England had warned us against as Popish delusions, was placed before us as the truth, was offered to our acceptance in the most attractive and congenial form. The cathedrals and the old parish churches of our native land seemed to assume a new aspect, and the prayers we had so long used, to have a new meaning. There was a tranquillity, a dignity, an earnestness about the writers of that period and that school which took a great hold on the mind. The religious depth and literary merit of Dr. Newman's sermons, the exquisite poetry of the "Christian Year," the stories which, in various ways, illustrated church principles, the lessons of self-training contained in Father Faber's and Archdeacon, now Archbishop Manning's writings—all did their work and prepared the soul for the reception of Catholic truth and discipline. It was very delightful to think that, without offending relatives or losing friends, we might become what many of us had longed to be, Catholics to all intents and purposes, Catholics after a fashion of our own indeed, but still a genuine and real fashion. A void was, as it were, filled up, a craving satisfied, a hope realized.

All this Ita felt as she examined the books she had brought home with her. They made a great impression

on her mind; a new kind of existence seemed to open before her. There is a turning-point in many lives, a moment in which we perceive that there is a great inward work to be done, and the means by which to do it; when we see that religion, if it is anything, must be everything, that we must not give to our Creator less than all. The mere perception of this is an event in our spiritual history, and, if we do not turn back, it will lead us very far. This insight into a new world is sometimes indistinct and dim like the first hazy light of morning, sometimes sudden like a burst of sunshine. We begin to understand how a monotonous and obscure existence may be interesting, and life become more beautiful as it advances, instead of losing its charm and its value as we once feared it would when youth was at an end. In one shape or another this revelation is vouchsafed to all those whom God calls to a more than ordinary amount of devotedness to His service; and it was probably on that night that Ita sat in her little study, lighting one candle after another while she pored over Edgar's books, that the first ideas rose in her mind which were eventually to have the greatest influence over her fate. The calm, strong, simple tone of what she then read struck her wonderfully. There was something authoritative in it which she felt to be what she needed. It was a relief, like finding a wall to lean against when pushed about by a moving crowd. She repeated over and over again the words, "In quietness and in confidence shall be thy strength;" and they seemed to impart to her peace and energy. She could hardly read a whole page through of any of those books which were revealing a new world to her, without shutting up the volume in her hand and musing in silence, as she walked up and down the room, or stood at the window gazing on the starlit sky, which had never seemed so wonderful to

her before. Then taking pen in hand she made plans, drew up for herself rules, formed resolutions, and longed for the morning to begin putting them into practice. "In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength." The sentence rang in her ears, it seemed to have a magical power over her; not that she felt at that moment quiet, far from it, nor could she well have defined in whom or in what she had confidence; but there was light and strength in the distance, she foresaw, she felt it; an inward hidden life had quickened in her soul.

After a short sleep she woke with a consciousness of a change in her existence. She said her prayers more attentively, more fervently than was her wont. Even the service at the church at Marchbanks on the following Sunday seemed to her less tedious than usual. Some of the things she had read in Edgar's books gave more interest to certain portions of the service; the idea which ran through them all that the Church of England was, after all, Catholic, though its catholicity had been so long disfigured and concealed, was traceable she felt in many of the prayers. She repeated the Creed with a new feeling—"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," was not then perhaps an empty phrase without any meaning in it! The absolution had some connection with those awful words of Scripture about binding and loosing which had so often puzzled her. It was difficult to look at Mr. Power and think of him as a priest, he was so utterly different from any of the persons she had been in the habit of considering as such; but the very activity of the debate which was going on in her own mind made the dulness of his sermon endurable. The rest of the day she spent in reading and musing over the various works which, with judicious care, Edgar had selected as most likely to give her a favourable bias towards High

Church principles. She found in them much of what had so powerfully attracted her to Catholicism abroad —a reverence for antiquity—the use of time-honoured words and names—a poetry thrown over devotional duties and observances, which she did not fancy could ever have been met with out of the Church of Rome. Besides all this, she was struck with the moral and religious training which this system seemed to promise —that education of the soul, the development of which she had had very little opportunity of witnessing anywhere else, for she had gazed from without on the Catholic Church she knew nothing of its inward treasures. Mrs. Sydney, indeed, had indicated that it possessed gifts of unspeakable power and virtue in those respects, but she had not had time to describe or analyze them ; and neither experience nor memory at that time enabled Ita to fall back on anything superior to the teaching which the new views, set before her, seemed to promise.

The days which intervened between St. Thomas's Day and Christmas Eve were spent in this interesting study, and passed very quickly. Annie had promised that she and Mrs. Gerald would call for Ita at half-past eight on the Wednesday evening on their way to Bramblemoor. The night was clear, cold, and starry —a beautiful night for the time of year. It was freezing, but the air so still that it did not feel very cold. The trees, bushes, hedges, and grass looked lovely, glittering with hoar frost in the bright moonlight. As they approached the village, the tinkling of the church bells was heard, joyously sounding a welcome to the worshippers that were crossing the common in various directions, attracted by the novelty of a service on that night and at that hour.

"What odd dreams one sometimes has!" Ita said, as they drove past a clump of elms, which stood on

one side of the small churchyard. "I dreamt last night that I had been drowned, and had come to life again."

"I never dreamt that," Annie answered, "but it really happened to me. Did not it, Aunt Gerald?"

"You were not actually drowned, but you were in danger of it."

"But did not I remain in the water long enough to be quite insensible?"

"Yes, my love. What are you looking at so earnestly, Ita?"

"I have such a strange dislike to moonlight. It always gives me a nervous feeling of faintness. It makes me quite ill."

The young girl had turned very pale. Mrs. Gerald took her hands in hers and found them cold. She drew her close to herself, and there was a wistful look in her face as she bent over her. As they drove up to the gate of the churchyard, and the carriage stopped, Ita said, "It is over now—I am well again." The colour had returned to her cheeks, and, when they entered the church, Mrs. Gerald was the palest of the two.

Never had any of the rural congregation, which met in the little church on that Christmas Eve, seen so pretty a sight before in a place of worship. The walls were hung with wreaths of holly, glowing with their coral berries. A large cross composed of flowers stood over the communion table, which was made to look as much like an altar as possible. Two lighted candles were on each side of it, and the whole of the building brightly illuminated. These decorations had a joyful effect on the hearts of all present. Even Annie, the staunchest Protestant of the lot, could not help feeling pleased. The old-fashioned hymn—

"Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King"—

was sung before the service; and, though the school children's voices were not particularly melodious, Edgar's deep bass notes and Ita's sweet voice made the simple chant seem full of beauty. After the prayers, the "Adeste Fideles," with English words, delighted Ita's ears—that air she had so often heard in Catholic Churches, and which had such a familiar sound to her, seemed to establish a link between the worship she had secretly loved and the one she was beginning to feel attracted to. After the service was over, Edgar gave a short familiar instruction to his parishioners. He did not read it, but spoke words that seemed to come from his heart. Entirely new were the substance and style of this address to his listeners. He described in a familiar manner, even like one who might have seen it, the place where the Virgin Mother had taken refuge. He told his hearers to fancy themselves there—to watch what went on—to picture to themselves the scene. He spoke of the Blessed Virgin gently, reverently, lovingly; and of the divine Infant in a fervent, earnest way which made their hearts burn within them. Edgar had drunk deeply from the wells of Catholic piety, and his was a heart and a mind which could wonderfully exert influence, and captivate other hearts and minds. All who heard him that night were astonished at his simple eloquence; it certainly was eloquence, for whatever touches, moves, and persuades others must be so. One old man, as he left the church, said he had never known before what Christmas meant, and should think much more of it than he had hitherto done.

Ita was much impressed by the whole scene, and coming, as it did, upon the thoughts of the last few days, no wonder that it should affect her. She had no idea that an Anglican service could have moved her

so much, and it must be true, she thought, that the Church of England was quite different from what she had supposed it to be. It must have hidden merits which only required to be brought to light. The new resolutions she had made grew stronger; she resolved to be good, very good, more than commonly good. Edgar had spoken of the joyful tidings which the angels had announced to the shepherds, and then he had said that there was a day and an hour in many persons' lives, in which tidings of great joy were brought to them. An angel's voice seemed to whisper for the first time, secrets concerning God and their souls. It was a strange joy, he said, that that voice sometimes promised, one from which the cowardly shrink, for it often presages suffering. Perhaps the shepherds who heard the angels' tidings on the green hills of Bethlehem were doomed soon afterwards to listen, in their desolate homes, to the loud cry of Rachel's anguish. God's special graces, he said, were the harbingers of special griefs, and the joys of Christians most fully felt by those on whom the shadow of the cross had rested since infancy.

Ita went home with these words in her ears and in her heart. As they left the church she leant on Annie, and said, "Oh, dear, darling Annie, how good you must always be, you who are to be Mr. Derwent's wife."

Annie looked unusually grave, and answered nothing. There was very little conversation in the carriage in which they all drove home. Before Ita was deposited at the back door of Marchbanks house, Mrs. Gerald asked her if she thought Lady Emily would be well enough to see her, if she called in a day or two. Ita thought she would, unless she happened to have had a bad night; and thereupon they parted.

A new era had begun in Ita's life. The glimpse she

had had of the gaieties of the world at Carsdale, had made little impression upon her. She would never have been in danger of becoming worldly and frivolous; other dangers and other snares she might have found on her way through life. She might have gone into extremes of various kinds; she might have indulged in hero-worship of a false and perilous nature. She was just at the age when the character is apt to take a new direction. If she had seen more of Mrs. Sydney, her influence would, perhaps, have induced her to enter at once on the question of the claims and merits of the Church of Rome; and she would then, probably, have joined it, and her own fate and that of others been different from what it eventually proved. But Edgar's arrival at Bramblemoor—the opening of the church there—the services she attended—the sermons she heard, and the books she read, took an entire hold of her mind. What religious writers called first fervours were kindled in her soul. Those are wonderful days in which nothing seems hard or difficult, when there is a joy in every opportunity for exertion or sacrifice—when the will seems to rush forward to the accomplishment of everything which the mind lays hold of in the way of duty—when doctrines hitherto unknown or misunderstood assume a mastery over us which results in new practices, new thoughts, a new and cheering sense of what we are living, hoping, and striving for. Divine consolations, in mercy given to lead the soul onward, mingle with human feelings, which in those early days of the spiritual life prevail largely, though unconsciously, in much of what seems to ourselves to be piety, and to others excitement. Ita felt as if she had never been happy before. Everything connected with religion had become pleasant. She took delight in getting up at daybreak, whatever the weather might be—rain, sleet, snow, wind, or mist

—and with her waterproof cloak and umbrella, walking swiftly across the park and the common, a good three miles, to the morning service. The tinkling of the bell used to sound pleasantly in her ears as she faced the cold north wind, and there was a consciousness of making a great exertion, of despising luxury and comfort, of doing something out of the common way, which produced a particularly agreeable sensation of self-approval; not blamable, good as a beginning, but perhaps a little tainted with self-complacency. She, the school children, and three or four other persons, made up the congregation on week-days. She wondered Annie did not come, forgetting that she lived seven miles off and must have had the coachman and servants up at a most inconveniently early hour; and when she was reminded of this, her wonder changed into pity. One day that she was expressing this feeling, Annie, exclaimed, "I think it is just as well to say one's prayers at home; so, if I went, it would not be for the sake of the prayers, but to hear Edgar's voice and see him, which is to me the greatest happiness in the world. It is on that account I don't go to Bramblemoor even on Sundays. I might be thinking more of him than of my prayers."

"I should have thought," Ita replied, "that such a feeling as yours for Mr. Derwent would have helped you to pray more fervently. I think that to admire and love any one on earth very much makes one love God so much more. I remember once reading that somebody said of St. Francis of Sales, the Holy Bishop of Geneva, who wrote that book Mr. Derwent likes so much, 'The Introduction to a Devout Life,' 'If Monsieur de Genéve is so good, how good must God, Who made him, be.' When I feel an enthusiasm about good people, I always have had that idea in my mind. But, Annie, when you are married, and if

Mr. Derwent is Vicar of Holmwood, you will be obliged to go to church there."

"Of course I shall, it will be my duty to do so. On the whole I am not sure that I am glad Edgar is a clergyman."

"Oh, Annie, it is such a beautiful useful life!"

"But it is a very engrossing one. I really see very little of him."

"But cannot you be yourself engrossed in it? Cannot you make every one of his interests yours, and work for him, both in his absence and in his presence. He should be the sun and you the moon of his parish; whilst he shines by his virtues and his eloquence, you should win hearts by your gentleness and sweetness. If all wives ought to be helpmates, clergymen's wives should be so more especially."

"Your flights are too high for me. I cannot make myself into a moon. I have no talent for winning hearts."

"Yet how much loved you are."

"I have not won anybody's heart that I know of. Those who care for me have done so without my having anything to do with it. Have you heard that Eliza Conway is coming next week to Bramblemoor?"

"Yes. The schoolmistress told me so. She is to live with her and nurse the sick, and I am to spend three days in the week working with her, when Lady Emily can spare me; and she is often now quite willing I should be away for the whole day. She dozes over her knitting, and does not want anybody but her maid."

"Is it true that you go twice a day sometimes for the service at Bramblemoor?"

"Yes, but it tires me very much; and now, if I can stay between whiles with Eliza and be of use there, it will be a great relief."

"I hear you do not eat meat now on Fridays."

Ita coloured; for she had begun with a kind of eager excitement to act upon Edgar's advice in that respect. Nothing could exceed her zeal in complying with his instructions; whatever he intimated in his sermons that it would be well to do, she instantly practised, but she had not as yet had any private conversation with him, or been much in his society. Her admiration of him was unbounded; but there was one point alone about which she did not feel as if she should ever be able to practise what he told her he hoped his parishioners would many of them do when he was ordained priest. She could never, she thought, go to confession to him. She could not analyze her feeling on that subject. She could imagine that it would be a great help, a great consolation, to kneel at the feet of some grey-headed, venerable, old man, and accuse herself of all the sins and miseries of her life; and that to hear words of absolution addressed individually to herself would be the greatest of comforts; but it must be under peculiar circumstances—her secrets spoken to an unknown ear, and the message of God conveyed to her soul by an unknown voice.

Edgar worked very hard, and it was true that he had not much time to give to Holmwood and Annie. She was very patient with him, though somewhat exacting with others. There is nothing more touching than the gentleness of a self-willed person under the influence of a strong affection. Without taking any very keen interest in his plans, she listened with unwearied attention to all he said, because it was he who said it. She helped him to the best of her ability—not that she could see the use of many of the things which he wished to do and establish in his church and parish—but still in deference to what she considered his better judgment, she assisted him with money to

effect these changes whenever he wished it. She read the books he recommended assiduously, attentively, but without result as far as conviction went. Some of the moral lessons and religious ideas in the "Plain Sermons," and other works of the Oxford school, she admired, but her practical, positive, unimaginative mind could neither see consistency nor reason in the theory on which Anglicanism is built, nor enable her to do without seeing it. It seemed to her utterly illogical in principle, and, as it did not accord with her tastes and inclinations, she turned from it with pain indeed, because she would very much have desired to feel and think like Edgar, but with an increasing dislike and suspicion. The only merit she could see in Anglicanism was, that some people were kept by it from Roman Catholicism, which she hated still more. It certainly had that good result, she thought, in Ita's case, and of that she was very glad.

CHAPTER VIII.

Soon after Christmas, Mrs. Gerald had paid a long visit to Lady Emily Hendon. She had found her much altered in looks, and evidently very ill. They had begun by talking of various indifferent subjects, and then Mrs. Gerald said, in an indifferent manner also, "How well Miss Flower is looking?"

"She is very well, I think," Lady Emily languidly replied."

"Annie and I like her so much."

"I am very glad you do. It is such a good thing she should make friends, for I am sure I shall not live long, and I cannot think what she is to do when I die. Perhaps you could suggest something?"

"I hope dear Lady Emily, that you are mistaken, and that you will live a long time yet. But has not Miss Flower any relatives?"

"No; not a soul that anybody knows of. I may as well tell you about her. The people I took her from had picked her up at sea, somewhere on the coast. They were fishermen going to Corsica. They took the baby into their boat, and brought her home with them some months afterwards. They used sometimes to beg from travellers on the plea of having adopted this baby. She was very pretty; and when, two or three years afterwards, some of my friends thought it would amuse me to have a child in the house, they told me of this little thing, and I adopted her and brought her up. We called her 'Margarita,' the Pearl of the Sea, it

seemed so appropriate, and she called herself 'Ita.' She has always been a good, dear little thing. I wish now I had married her to somebody abroad; you cannot weil arrange that sort of thing here, and really I do not know what she is to do when I die. I shall leave her something of course, but I have not much besides my jointure. You cannot think, I suppose, of any one who would like to marry her. She will have four thousand pounds."

There was something husky in Mrs. Gerald's voice as she answered, "No, I cannot say I do. I suppose she was given up to you altogether?"

"Yes. Those people signed a paper to that effect. I dare say Mr. Hendon would be kind to her if I died; but it would not suit him, I am sure, to have a girl to take care of."

"You will get better soon, and return to Mentone," Mrs. Gerald answered, as if trying to say something.

"Oh, no! I am more ill than you suppose. I ought never to have come to England."

Mrs. Gerald inwardly re-echoed the words, but not on Lady Emily's account. It was for her own sake that she felt it. What was the importance of a few more or less years of existence to a languishing invalid, compared with the doubt which had arisen in her own mind, and which had begun to embitter her existence.

To understand this it is necessary to go back some years, and describe what happened at the time of her eldest brother's death. It has already been said that her affection for him was the strongest feeling of her heart, and that her dislike to her younger brother, Edgar's father, had dated equally from childhood. Herbert Derwent had never shared hers and her brother Robert's attachment to Holmwood, or any of those family feelings which were so marked a feature

in their characters. He was a selfish, careless, extravagant young man, who professed to hate living in the country, and had been known to say that, if the old place ever came into his hands, he would sell it as soon as he could. Mrs. Gerald had brooded over those words with profound resentment and indignation. He married in a way which did not particularly tend to please his relatives, and they became still more estranged from him, and in consequence he from them and from Holmwood. It was, therefore, with an intense joy that Mrs. Gerald, soon after her widowhood, heard of her eldest brother's marriage, and some months afterwards welcomed him and his young wife at Nice, where she had remained since her husband's death. They spent the winter there, and Mrs. Derwent, towards the end of February, gave birth to a little girl. As soon as she was recovered from her confinement, she travelled on with her husband and child to Florence and Rome. Mrs. Gerald was to meet them at Genoa, on their way back, and thither she went on one of those evenings in May, which in Italy fulfils everything that poets of every age have sung or said of that smiling month. She travelled along the Corniche road, lately opened, revelling in the matchless beauty of scenes which pass before the eye like visions which it would fain retain and dwell on in protracted admiration, but which too quickly succeed each other, like dreams of a fairer world than our own. What will it be when we are carried at railroad speed through that dazzling magnificence of earth, sea, and sky. Will beauty penetrate the mind henceforward as deeply, will it mould the fancy and saturate the soul as in days of yore, now that one glance only is allowed at objects which a poet would once have gazed on for hours with the silent worship of passion or of prayer?

A delightful anticipation of approaching enjoyment mingled in Mrs. Gerald's heart with the emotions of that journey. She fondly loved her young sister-in-law; and the little baby who had been born in her house had become the dearest object of interest to her. She was cold in manner, but when she loved it was very intensely. This little child, though a girl, was to inherit Holmwood if she had no brother. It was only to pass to Herbert or his children if Robert had none. This new treasure of their lives was to be carried back that summer to the old home, was to grow up in the love of it, and, as she looked at the little brown creatures playing in the olive woods or on the sandy shores of the Riviera, the thought of "our baby," "our little Annie," "our child," was ever in her mind. Robert Derwent had married rather late in life, and, therefore, all the joy of his wedded life and the sweetness of loving his child had come as a new happiness to his sister. When she approached Genoa her heart beat with glad impatience; when the proud and beautiful city, *Genova la Superba*, burst on her delighted sight, her eyes still turned towards the sea and to the countless sails on the bosom of the broad bay, and of the wide realm of blue sunny waters beyond, with a bound of eager hope and exulting delight. "To-night," she thought, "to-night perhaps, at latest to-morrow, I shall see my own dear ones, the only ones on earth whom I love and who love me: his kind dear face; her smile when she shows me the baby in her short clothes; his quiet delight; Maud's 'Oh, Aunt Gerald!' for so she always called her." She pictured it all, she lived through it many times in thought, never again in reality.

That night there was a storm, fearful and sudden, and a great darkness, and, near the entrance of the bay, two steamers came in collision; one went down,

the other was shattered to pieces. From the former only two human beings escaped—a cabin-boy was picked up with a child in his arms.

Mrs. Gerald had received the night before a letter which said her brother with his wife and baby had sailed from Leghorn in the steamer "Acquilea," and the news was brought her in the morning that the vessel had gone down and all on board of her were lost. A few hours afterwards, when she was sitting in the dull hopeless stupor that a sudden and extraordinary calamity brings on, the English Consul asked to speak to her. He said a little girl, apparently three or four months old, had been saved by a sailor, who was the only survivor besides that child of the passengers in the "Acquilea;" that the night-gown this baby had on was marked with the initials A. D., and that the boy said he thought it was the child of an English gentleman and lady who had a cabin to themselves. The rush of something between renewed anguish and an awakened hope, with its whole future of consolation, roused at once Mrs. Gerald; and, though the instant before she would have been incapable of stirring, she sprang now to her feet and insisted on immediately going to see the child. She felt at once that any question of recognizing a baby only four months old and whom she had not seen for three months was out of the question; that as far as that went she could not trust her own impressions; but the night-gown she would of course be able to identify, as she had herself helped her sister-in-law to prepare, and, in particular, to get marked, the clothes for little Annie. The letters A. D. seemed to float before her eyes as she walked to the Spedale, and the intense excitement of her mind seemed for a while to overcome the terrible suffering she endured. It was a strange moment for her when she was led up to the woman who was nursing the

baby. Kneeling down she looked at it with inexpressible eagerness. The eyes seemed to her like those of her infant niece, and there was nothing in the small features dissimilar to the little face she remembered. But when the night-gown was produced, every doubt vanished. It was certainly Annie's. Not only did the initials prove it, but Mrs. Gerald recognized the pattern of the lace trimming which she had herself chosen.

The cabin-boy was summoned and cross-examined. "Was there more than one infant on board?"

Three he believed, but he could not tell if they were boys or girls; the English Signora's child was a girl he knew.

How did he get hold of this little child?

Somebody gave it to him to hold just as the crash took place. Everybody was running about in confusion.

"For the love of the Madonna, take the creature," some one said.

That could not have been Robert or Maud, Mrs. Gerald thought, but she did not say a word.

"Had this English lady and gentleman Italian servants?" the Consul asked.

"Sicuro," the boy replied; "the baby had an Italian nurse."

In an agitated voice Mrs. Gerald declared that the night-gown was sufficient evidence that this was her little niece, and appealed to the Consul, who agreed with her, that the evidence appeared conclusive, but suggested at the same time that some one should come from Florence who had lately seen the child, and could testify to her identity.

Mrs. Gerald took the baby home with her, and from that moment was absorbed in the care of this little being, who, in consequence of the exposure and fatigue she had undergone, was for a long time in a precarious condition. In a short time, the master of the hotel

where Mr. and Mrs. Derwent had been staying at Florence, and one of the servants there, arrived for the purpose of declaring whether the little girl so wonderfully preserved on the night of the accident was their child. They no doubt perceived with Italian acuteness that there was a passionate desire on the rich English lady's part that their evidence might corroborate the fact; and, not having, probably, any distinct impression to the contrary, they did not hesitate to assure her and other witnesses, in the presence of the Consul, that the Bambina was the little Signorina Anna, the daughter of that poor lady and gentleman whose fate had made so great a sensation at Florence, as well as at Genoa.

There the matter rested—no one called in doubt, and nobody did doubt, that Annie Derwent had been rescued from a watery grave, and she lived to be the idol of her aunt. Herbert Derwent did not question it, nor did he long survive his brother. Strange to say, the only person on whose mind the faintest shadow of a doubt remained was Mrs. Gerald herself. She believed what she had asserted, her reason was satisfied by the evidence, and every feeling enlisted on the side of that belief. It would have been despair to her to have doubted it, for her whole soul, from the first days of that dreadful grief, was wrapped up in the rescued child, but with the nervous self-tormenting which belongs to some natures—that proneness to a secret harrowing, analyzing of transient thoughts and unacknowledged misgivings which exist in some reserved characters, she had sometimes inward arguments with herself in which, what seemed to her the devil's advocate, was perpetually suggesting every sort of possible supposition which might affect the evidence which, to indifferent persons, seemed conclusive.

As little Annie advanced in age, she watched for a family likeness to her parents, or to any members of her family, with a feverish anxiety. It so happened that no such resemblance did appear. Of course this was no real evidence against her identity, but still it tormented Mrs. Gerald, and she had a nervous fear that others, also, might notice this. It was partly for this reason that she collected all the family pictures in her own room, and even there screened them from sight. If anybody remarked that Annie was not like her parents, it caused her a paroxysm of pain. If she could have seen a gesture, a look, a habit of any kind, which bore in it an hereditary stamp, the relief would have been great. Sometimes she held her head with both hands, and tried to crush this ever-recurring mental strife. She told herself that even if she had the least suspicion that Annie was not Annie (and she would writhe at the bare thought of such a supposition), she would not be justified in harbouring it. Since others had accepted the evidence as sufficient, even those interested to disprove it, she had no business to question it even for an instant; it seemed like treachery towards that idolized child, and it was this secret, involuntary misgiving which made her particularly anxious that Annie should marry her cousin Edgar. In no possible case, then, would any one be wronged, and she felt she would be a happier person when that matter was settled. A new nervousness, however, had now taken possession of her mind—a new fear, doubt, presentiment, delusion, fancy, whatever it was, had begun to haunt her. It began on the day when she had called for the first time at Marchbanks—the very moment she set her eyes on Ita Flower. What for twenty years she had looked for in vain—what for twenty years she had been pining to see in Annie's face, that girl had, she saw it at once

—a striking likeness to her late sister-in-law. The brown eyes, the long dark lashes, the dimples in her cheeks, the full lips, the small mouth, the very picture her memory was for ever drawing, seemed to stand before her eyes. It did not at first suggest any idea beyond an accidental resemblance; but even that awoke in her a sort of jealousy. It seemed so hard that a stranger could be so like what Maud Derwent had been, and her own child bear no resemblance to her. She felt at once attracted by Ita, and yet indisposed towards her. Annie was handsome and good, and some people admired very much her fine countenance and bright glance; but Mrs. Gerald had never been herself so painfully conscious of a want of grace and charm in her manner as after making acquaintance with Ita. She wished not to see this grace and charm, she tried not, but it so happened that they were exactly what naturally most captivated her. This struggle went on till the time of the visit to Carsdale, and there she heard that Ita was not the daughter of any of Lady Emily's friends, but a child adopted abroad—"*picked up at sea.*"

It would be impossible to describe the tumult which these words raised in Mrs. Gerald's mind—the sickening terror of mental suffering which seized upon her. It was as if the faint misgiving, which had so long haunted her, had suddenly assumed a real tangible form. It was, however, too painful a possibility to contemplate when anything of reality became connected with it. She had not repulsed the shadowy doubt of past days, with the vehemence with which she thrust back the grave question which the present was forcing upon her. She fought against it with a desperate resolution. She argued, with herself, that it would be wrong even to give the subject a thought; to re-open the case, as it were, which no one but

herself would ever dream of reconsidering. But whenever, from that moment, she heard Ita's voice, or laugh, whenever—which she avoided as much as she could—she looked at her, the feeling returned; the likeness haunted her. She could not bear to turn her eyes on the picture in her room, nor could she contain herself sometimes when Ita said or did something, which seemed quite insignificant to others, but had some peculiar effect upon herself. The way she had of throwing up her hands when surprised or pleased; or of sitting clasping her knee and bending forward, when listening to something which particularly interested her, brought her young sister-in-law so vividly before Mrs. Gerald, that she felt as if she should go out of her mind. And yet it might all be fancy, she might be giving the most ridiculous importance to an accidental resemblance. Sometimes she thought of showing the picture in her room to Mr. Pratt, and asking him if *he* saw the likeness—even of telling him of her misery on the subject; but when she set about acting on that thought, she recoiled from it with terror. It was an absurd, nervous fancy, which it was her duty to keep under and suppress. In the meantime, her feeling towards Ita was a strange one. At times it would almost have seemed as if she hated her, and yet at others an irrepressible tenderness stole into her heart and manner. All this was taking place in the soul of a person who had all the sufferings of an impetuous nature, without the relief of an expansive disposition. Storms passed over her face; but they never burst forth in words, and seldom in tears. It was like fire in a vase, which would not break.

It was on a day when as usual this inward strife had been raging, that she felt impelled to go and see Lady Emily Hendon. The present state of her mind seemed to her—as is always the case when we are

suffering—the most intolerable she could conceive. A little more or a little less reason to think of that extraordinary possibility would be a relief; for now and then she could not help feeling, "Oh! if that was Robert's child—if she was, after all, the little infant Annie I received into my arms at Nice, and made him kiss for the first time." She wept over this recollection, and then her own darling, her beloved, real Annie came smiling into the room, and she was frightened at having, even for a minute, dwelt on the doubt. The visit to Marchbanks was paid a day or two afterwards. A pause in the conversation, which has been already related, ensued after Lady Emily had expressed the wish that she had never come to England. Mrs. Gerald at last said, "If it should be God's will, Lady Emily, that you should die before Miss Flower is married, I promise you that I will do all I can for her. But will you allow me to say that it would be a great object in such a case to place that paper you spoke of—I mean the document that was drawn up and signed by the people who gave her up to you—in safe hands. I suppose it contains the date of the day when she was found."

"Oh! yes, I suppose so; but I have not got it here. I think I must have left it in my bureau at Mentone; but it is so long since I have seen it, that I am not quite sure."

"That is very unfortunate. One would think that it must have been extremely important to preserve every particular connected with Miss Flower's history. Do you remember what it said about the date, and the part of the coast where she was found?"

"It was somewhere on the coast of the Riviera; but rather far out at sea, I think. We always keep her birthday on St. Margaret's day—her *festa*, as they say at Mentone—but, you know, the day she was found of course was not her birthday."

"But when was it?"

"I really do not remember."

"Do you remember which year it was?"

"I think it was twenty-one years ago."

"As much as that?"

"Well, it might be twenty; I am not sure. By the way, I think it was only eighteen. No, no—twenty."

Mrs. Gerald threw herself back in her chair with a feeling of despair. "Do you recollect hearing if there were any initials on her clothes when she was found?"

"No, I don't think there were; but by this time it cannot signify, you know."

"Have you any servants who lived with you at the time you adopted Miss Flower?"

"Not here. My maid, who was with me then, died two years ago. Her husband lives at Mentone."

"Would Mr. Hendon remember about that paper and its contents?"

"I dare say he would. No, by the way, he would not; for he was asking me about it the other day."

"I must say that it appears to me inconceivable that you should have allowed so important a circumstance to escape your memory, as whether or not there were any initials on the child's clothes."

"I never heard whether she had any clothes at all. I wanted a child to adopt, and was told it would be a great charity to take this one, as she belonged to nobody. That is all I recollect. You are a very fortunate person, Mrs. Gerald, if your own experience has not shown you that people cannot always remember things, but you have not been like me, an invalid for thirty years."

"But that paper ought to have been kept," Mrs. Gerald answered, with a heightened colour.

"I have no doubt I have it safe at Mentone," Lady Emily replied, with a look of weariness, which implied what was indeed passing through her mind. "Really, when I asked you to be kind to that girl I did not mean to be bored in this way."

"Will you write for that paper?" Mrs. Gerald persisted.

"Nobody could find it but myself. What makes you so anxious about it?"

If Lady Emily had not been short-sighted, and the room darkened on account of the weakness of her eyes, she must have observed the agitation which her pettish question caused. With a tremulous voice Mrs. Gerald answered: "I think it very unfair to Miss Flower that this record of the only fact which could throw any light on her birth should not be forthcoming."

"I think, dear Mrs. Gerald, that I am likely to be more anxious about her interests than you can be. It is only a question of time. The paper is either at the bottom of one of my trunks here, or in my bureau at Mentone; it cannot be anywhere else. If I die, my executors will find it. I do not see why, weak and ill as I am, I should worry and fatigue myself with a useless search for it. And, after all, I really cannot imagine that, whether those initials were A. B. or D. C., it can make an atom of difference to Ita. Have you heard," she continued in the tone of a person determined to change the subject of conversation, "have you heard that Lord Carsdown is going to stand for the county at the next election instead of Mr. Bayham?"

"Yes; I heard it mentioned the other day. I cannot help sometimes regretting that my nephew Edgar has gone into the Church. I think he would have made an admirable speaker. He might have played

a part in political life, and been a very distinguished man."

"He has very odd ideas, has he not?"

"He is very High Church."

"But, dear Mrs. Gerald, surely when I left England, to be High Church meant to be everything most sensible and quiet. It was what almost all the Archbishops and Bishops were. The Evangelical party was the one that did strange things then—not going to the play or to balls, and eating cold meat on Sundays, and all that sort of thing."

"Great changes have happened since then," Mrs. Gerald answered. "It is very curious to observe the phases through which the mind of a nation passes."

"Since Ita has heard Mr. Derwent preach, she does not eat meat on Fridays. I do not think that can be good for her. I asked my doctor, and he says it will not do her any harm. But I do think she takes too long walks in the morning, and now I hear she is going to nurse sick people with a Miss Conway. I hope she will not go anywhere where there is fever. But her life is so dull here that I am really glad of anything that amuses her, poor child! There is no accounting for tastes. I find much talking tires me very much, and so I cannot be a very agreeable companion for her."

This hint about much talking induced Mrs. Gerald soon to take her leave. The visit had not tended to throw a feather's weight into the scale which she was continually weighing in her own mind without daring to ask herself what she would do if one of the two should ever happen to kick the beam. Two strange fears—two strange doubts—two strange loves it might almost be said, were perpetually contending with each other in her weary soul. The old deep love of bygone years, and the actual passionate affection of half a life-

time, rushed against each other in contending eddies of self-reproach, whether she harboured or repulsed the thoughts which forced themselves upon her with a relentless pertinacity.

CHAPTER IX.

The 13th of January was a happy day for Ita. Eliza Conway had arrived at Bramblemoor on the preceding afternoon, and taken possession of two little rooms above the grocer's shop, for which he had been only too pleased to find so good a tenant. Eliza was engaged to be married to a clergyman. Her ideas on the subject of the celibacy of Anglican priests had been modified, in the first place, in favour of Edgar's peculiar case, and since then in favour of the above-mentioned excellent, hard-working curate, in whose parish she had been labouring for more than a year in London, and who had recently proposed to her. Eliza's ideas were seldom, if ever, changed by the influence of other people; but, in some instances, they underwent a spontaneous change, and she was as earnest and confident in her own opinions for the time being, as if they had always remained the same. She had a peculiar talent for drawing fine distinctions, and it was fortunate she possessed that power; for, with her great anxiety always to act in the most perfect manner possible, it might have often been difficult without it to reconcile even in her own mind her former opinions with present views and intentions.

From the time she had determined to marry Mr. Roland, she had been full of the project of a sort of confraternity of clergymen's wives with a preparatory noviciate for young women disposed to enter that state of life. She thought clergymen might be bound, or at

any rate advised, to choose their wives from amongst this class of ladies. She did not, indeed, adopt Dr. Hook's memorable suggestion that the wives of the clergy should act as confessors to the women of their parishes; for she understood too well the Catholic doctrine on the subject of the Sacrament of Penance to advocate this extraordinary innovation, but she thought, and so far perhaps rightly enough, that the kind of duties generally performed by the wives of English clergymen would be all the more efficiently executed, if a special training and appropriate teaching had prepared them for the exercise of active charity, and semi-ministerial functions. It was, therefore, with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength—with that honesty of purpose and fervent zeal which are the redeeming points of our times, and the element through which modern society, with all its vices and errors, may yet be saved, even as ten righteous men, could they have been found, would have averted a fiery deluge from the cities of the plain—that she resolved to devote the time that was to elapse before her marriage could take place, to a life of poverty and labour in a place where she could hear from the pulpit what she believed to be true, where she would not have mentally to protest against almost every word her clergyman uttered, or be obliged when she taught poor children, or spoke to sick people, to express herself in ambiguous language, which might afford them a chance of imbibing Catholic doctrines or consolations, and yet not expose her to the censures of her spiritual pastors.

In the great majority of parishes in England this would have been her position, and she was right to avoid the harassing dilemma. But it is impossible not to be struck with the thought of the number of persons in the Established Church who have no option as to the teaching they shall receive, and of the anomaly that

lies in the very words that imply that this is or ought to be a matter of choice on the part of individuals. For how are the poor and ignorant to recognize the boundary line which divides the orthodox from the heretic, the Catholic priest (*sic*) from the Protestant minister, who both call themselves clergymen of the Church of England?—how settle for themselves when they ought to accept or to reject the teaching of their spiritual pastors and masters, and laying their finger on the spot in the graduating scale, at the foot of which, for instance, the present Dean of Ripon takes his stand, and at the top of which the ritualistic incumbent of St. Alban's, Holborn, holds his position—decide when a humble and docile soul is or is not to "hear the Church," and accept its doctrines on trust. It is said that there is but one single moment when a pear is ripe enough and not too ripe—the chances are greatly against its being picked at that moment. It would be an equally delicate point to fix on the shade of opinion in the Church of England that would be pronounced orthodox by even a small number of those who call themselves its members.

Edgar's parishioners, poor, neglected, and unlettered men and women, were neither competent nor disposed to offer any opposition to him, or to take umbrage at the High Church teaching and practices he at once proceeded to induce amongst them. They became associated in their minds with the charity and kindness of their new clergyman, with many comforts bestowed upon them in sickness, with visits on the one hand from Lady Emma Cars, and on the other from Miss Derwent, which ended in warm gowns, waistcoats, and flannel petticoats for the aged—shoes for the children—situations in good families for the young girls—and school feasts connected, more or less, with the Church services. This was better, they thought, than anything

the Methodist chapel on the other side of the common had ever done for them; and, as one old man expressed it, the new clergyman's religion would serve his purpose as well as anything else. But there was something beyond this after a while, especially when Eliza Conway had settled in the village, and Ita came most days to help her in her work. It would not have been possible that three young ardent souls, two of which were carrying out long-cherished hopes and desires, and the third, in the full fervour of a recent change from indifference and listlessness to strong religious impressions, should have failed to win the hearts and influence the lives of those amongst whom they laboured. For they were bringing to long neglected but, generally speaking, not hardened or vicious persons, tidings of great joy, they were teaching them some of the principal truths of Christianity, and in good faith what they themselves believed to be true—they were raising them by prayer and worship to new conceptions of what is good and beautiful.

At a time when Anglicanism did not pretend to an unreal identity of doctrine and similarity of ceremonial with the Catholic Church, but directed its efforts to the maintenance of some important Christian truths, to the cultivation of a piety more fervent and more sober than that which had hitherto prevailed in the Church of England, and a more reverential and attractive mode of worship, a real improvement was often seen in congregations under the influence of clergymen of the new school. They were advancing themselves and leading on others towards Catholic truth, and with the heart and spirit of apostles devoting themselves to the work before them.

In Edgar Derwent's case there was at once a great zeal for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, and also an eager interest in the success of a system, the

merits of which he felt he was now himself putting to the test. He was not a vain man, perhaps not even a proud one, but self-reliant to no ordinary degree. He could not see anything except from one point of view; he would have died sooner than do anything he did not think right, but then what he was determined to do he always did manage to think right. There was, in this respect, a likeness between him and Eliza Conway, but with this difference—she had not his abilities, his gifts, his charm of mind and manners, but she had a more devout mind, and greater personal humility. His character would have seemed at first sight one very independent of the sympathy of others, nevertheless he prized it more than could have been supposed. To feel that he was admired, excited him to excel—to know he was appreciated, helped him to persevere.

For instance, Ita's constant attendance at the daily service in his church stimulated his fervour. The profound attention with which she listened to his sermons made him more eloquent. Her eager adoption of his opinions gave him the most intense satisfaction. He had been the means of counteracting the fatal bias, for so he considered it, which had inclined her towards the Church of Rome—he had seen her adopt one by one all his views, and put in practice whatever he recommended. He expected her to furnish a glorious proof of what the Catholic teaching of the Church of England can effect in training an impulsive character, leading forward a generous soul, and disciplining a superior intellect. Like a fine instrument which responds to the player's touch, her whole disposition seemed to be undergoing a transformation under his influence. His example, his advice, his books, and his sermons were gradually forming her into his ideal of a Christian woman. She was finding new elements of strength, of peace, and of happiness in the life of prayer and of

labour she was beginning to lead. Her gratitude to him was real, and he deserved it at her hands; for never can anything cancel the debt we owe to those who at any time, or in any measure, and however imperfectly, have been the means of bringing us to know and love our Creator and Saviour: and it was in the litle church where Edgar ministered that Ita had taken the first step in that direction; for up to that time nothing but transient emotions or occasional desires to be good and to serve God had crossed her soul. He had taught her to pray by rule, not by mere impulse; to examine her conscience; to love the poor in a Christian manner. She owed him much, and on the other hand she helped him a great deal in his parish work. There was a charm in Ita which told on everybody she approached. It was felt by the rough peasantry of the moorlands as much as by persons of refinement and education. She had a gift which, when it is joined with quick tender feelings and earnestness of spirit, exercises a wonderful influence on all sorts of persons. It is not wit—not even humour; it is what the French call, *le mot pour rire*. It is like the ripple of the stream; it gladdens everything, and gladness is so much wanted by weary hearts. A smile on the face of a poor man has a countless value. "She is a bit of sunshine;" "she is a good sight for sore eyes;" "she is a terrible one for cheering one up," were common sayings in the mouths of the poor, as Ita went in and out of their cottages.

As to herself, this kind of life was like the beginning of a new existence. Her natural activity had, for the first time, found an object, her conscience was at rest, her devotional instincts satisfied. The evenings, between Mr. Hendon, who read, and Lady Emily, who slept, she found no longer dull. She read volume after volume of religious and controversial writings with

unflagging interest, and watched eagerly in the newspapers for everything relating to the Oxford movement. The Church principles she heard so much of were connected in her mind with the new interests, the new feelings, the new happiness which filled her soul.

The winter passed pleasantly and quickly by. The only person who did not look well or happy at Holmwood was Mrs. Gerald. She sometimes seemed anxious to fix an early day after Easter for Annie's marriage, and at other moments to delay it. She announced that, as soon as it was over, she should settle in a little cottage of her own by the sea-side; and, one day that Ita was alone with her, she said, abruptly, "What do you mean to do when Lady Emily dies?" This question took the poor girl by surprise. She had often enough put it to herself, but to be asked it in this sudden manner was painful. Her eyes filled with tears, and she remained silent. Then Mrs. Gerald said, in a faltering voice, "Would you come and live with me?"

Ita looked up very much surprised. She had fancied Mrs. Gerald disliked her, and this proposal was perfectly unexpected. Some time before it would have given her pleasure; now she was touched and grateful; but a change had lately taken place in her wishes and feelings. Thoughts had been running in her mind about joining one of the sisterhoods that Edgar Derwent's friends had begun to establish. There was a question of founding a small community of that kind at Bramblemoor, and she had almost made up her mind to ask to be admitted. She made, therefore, a grateful but evasive answer to Mrs. Gerald's inquiry, and the subject dropped, perhaps to the relief of both, for they never felt at their ease with one another.

Time went on. Lent was nearly over. One morning, in April, Annie was sitting in the flower-garden

with Eliza, who was spending a few days with her to rest after a short attack of illness, and Ita, who had come over from Marchbanks for the day. Eliza was reading a letter; she looked up, and said, "Ita, Miss Dorrell and Miss Mainwright, Sister Mary and Sister Anna, you know, are very much inclined to take the red house on the common, the largest of the two, and to begin at once, if you make up your mind to join them when poor Lady Emily no longer requires your care."

There was a dead silence. Eliza had let a terrible cat out of the bag. If there was one thing Annie disliked more than another, it was convents, and the imitation of monastic life amongst Anglicans she especially could not endure. Edgar was to have broken to her the scheme about the contemplated sisterhood at Bramblemoor, but he had put off doing so, and this was the first time she had heard of it. She fixed her eyes on Ita with a look of inquiry and of displeasure. There was as much of a sneer in that look as was possible in a countenance the characteristic expression of which was openness. Annie could look angry, but not easily scornful. As to Ita, she blushed deeply—she really did not know why—but the disagreeable consciousness that she was doing so increased her confusion, and, at last, from mere nervousness, she burst into tears.

Both Eliza and Annie looked distressed. The former supposed that she must have changed her mind with regard to the plan she had been so eager about till then, and was afraid of being taken at her word. So she quickly said, "Do not be alarmed, my dear Ita; you need not give any answer about it just now. I thought you were longing to know what they said about the house. I must write some letters before post-time; so if you will excuse me, Annie, I will go in for a little while."

Annie made a rather ungracious nod, and, when she was gone, said to Ita, "What made you cry just now?"

"I can hardly tell. It sometimes happens to me all of a sudden to fancy that I shall be supposed to think or feel something I do not a bit think or feel. Then I get red—then I am vexed with myself—then I am afraid of crying—and then, like a fool, I cry."

"Are you thinking of becoming a sister?"

"Well, I have thought of it."

"Really, truly?"

"Yes—if those sisters settle at Bramblemoor."

A dark flash—if the two words can go together—passed over Annie's face. "Oh, you mean, then, to live here—I mean at Bramblemoor?"

"Yes, I think so; I have every reason to wish it."

"Oh!"

"I should like to be near you and Miss Conway, and then I should like to go on working for Mr. Derwent. He has taught me more than any one else has done, and, if I am ever good, I shall owe it to him."

Annie seemed touched. "Well, it is a great thing for any one to have done that for another."

"Yes! Is it not a great thing to help others to be good and happy? Is it not worth any amount of suffering? It is so beautiful to think of what some persons have done in that way, of the sacrifices they have made, of all they have surrendered without counting the cost."

"The Bible says we *are* to count the cost," Annie answered in a tremulous voice. Perhaps she was even then in the silent depths of her heart counting the cost of a great sacrifice.

A few days afterwards Eliza went to Marchbanks and asked to see Ita. She wanted to know if she had

made up her mind about the work among the poor, and the sisterhood at Bramblemoor. She was very much disappointed at her indecision on the subject; it had fitted in so beautifully with all her plans that the little community should settle in the parish where her future husband was to be curate, and eventually incumbent, when Edgar became Vicar of Holmwood, for so it had been arranged between them and Lord Carsdale. The little income which Lady Emily had settled on Ita would have helped to support the house. Everybody knew that she could not live at most more than a few months, and what could be more desirable than that Ita should find a home near her greatest friends, and one in which she could devote herself to the mode of life she had so ardently embraced. What was most to be dreaded was her going abroad and falling again in the way of Romish influences. It was, therefore, with the fullest intention of exerting to the uttermost her powers of reasoning and persuasion on the subject, that Eliza walked up the stairs leading to Miss Flower's little room. She was welcomed with the usual sweet smile, which was one of the great charms of Ita's face, but it quickly passed away, and the dove-like eyes had an unwonted expression of sadness. Eliza began by talking of the poor people and the school, but nothing seemed to interest her companion. "You are out of spirits," she said at last.

"I do not feel very well."

"What is the matter with you, dear?"

"Nothing particular. People cannot be always in spirits, you know. Mamma is much worse, I think."

"I am so sorry. It must be a great grief to you; but it is a consolation to think that when you lose her, you will have friends around you to comfort and love you."

"I shall be quite alone in the world then. I have

never thought that poor mamma cared very much for me; it is wrong perhaps to say so, for she has always been very kind to me; but, when she is gone, nobody will care for me."

"How can you say so, dear Ita? Mrs. Gerald, Annie, Mr. Hendon, Mr. Derwent, and I *all* care for you."

"I hope not, for then it will make you sorry to part with me."

"But we shall not part with you. Tell me, why have you given up that plan which you used to take so much delight in? Do not you mean to try to be a Sister of Charity, and remain amongst us and the poor people who love you so much?"

"No, I cannot stay here after mamma's death."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I don't know."

Eliza looked annoyed. Suddenly an idea struck her. "Have you seen Mrs. Sydney lately?"

"No," Ita answered with surprise.

"Oh, I thought she had been trying perhaps to unsettle you, and disturb the peace of mind you have found in your own Church."

"She would be quite right to do so, if she thought it was not a real peace."

"But it *was* real."

"Yes, I suppose so. I never had been so happy as during the last few months."

"Why then have you made up your mind to leave this place?"

There was no answer to this question, so Eliza asked again, "Where do you mean to go?"

Ita sighed and said, "To Mentone, I think, to some of my old friends there. I want to see the mountains, and the blue sky, and the sea again. Oh, if I could go and pray at San Michele as I used to do when my heart was sore, in old days!"

"You know very well that you have told me yourself that it is our books and our services that have done you good. It must be a temptation this hankering after a foreign Church."

"Perhaps it is; I do delight—I mean I have taken delight in the services at Bramblemoor, and learnt, oh, so many good things there; but I do not know how it is, when sorrow or difficulty come, I think of Catholic, Roman Catholic churches, I mean, and feel as I used to do when I was a child, and had a longing to lay my head on a real mother's breast."

"I am so sorry to hear you speak so," Eliza said, sadly; "I hoped you had learnt to love our Church."

"Oh, I do in a sort of way; I do love Bramblemoor Church; but when I go into the one here or at Holmwood it gives me a cold chill."

"But I am speaking of the Church of England."

"It is very well, Eliza, to speak of the Church of England, but the religion at Bramblemoor is not a bit like the religion here; and then I think it is all very inconsistent and wrong, all the talk about priests, and calling clergymen priests, and then that they should marry. They have no business to marry."

Eliza blushed deeply, and Ita immediately perceived that she had vexed her; her gentle little heart could not endure to give pain, and she said, "Dear Lizzie, I am cross to-day with everything and everybody. I cannot judge of those things. I daresay it is all right. Must you go? Will you not stay for luncheon?"

"No, indeed, I must walk home as fast as I can. There are several families I must see this afternoon."

"Then will you take this parcel with you?"

"To Mr. Derwent? You do not mean to say you have copied those two long articles and written out that sermon since last night?"

"Oh yes."

"But you must have sat up all night?"

"Not all night, Eliza; you know *he* must not write at night; his eyes are very weak."

"I am afraid they are; they do not look so, they are such beautiful eyes, but Annie told me the doctor says he must not overwork them. But you are overworking *yours*. I think I can guess now why you are a little out of sorts to-day. It is all fatigue."

"It does not tire me."

When Eliza was gone, Ita sank back in her chair, her eyes fixed on the ground. She repeated to herself the words, "It does not tire me;" adding, "but oh! I am so tired since yesterday."

This was what had happened the night before: she was writing in the library, and having occasion to look for a quotation which Edgar had asked her to insert in an article in the "British Critic" which she was copying for him, she asked Mr. Hendon where she could find the book. He went to get it for her, and as he was bringing it back said with a smile, "Do you know what I heard this morning, Miss Ita?"

"No," she said, holding out her hand for the volume.

"That Miss Derwent had better look sharp, for that you are running away with the parson's heart."

Ita did not blush, but turned as pale as a sheet. Was this said in earnest, or was it only a silly joke? Did people think it, and was it true? She did not know what to answer. Everything she could say seemed too grave or too light. She could not repel such a charge with a jest. At last she got out the words, "People say many foolish things."

"Yes," Mr. Hendon answered in a good-natured manner; "no doubt they do; but there is sometimes a grain of truth in a pound of folly, and if you do not mean, my dear little lady, to get yourself and

others into trouble, I would have you be on your guard."

It was right to warn her; and, great as the pain was, she could feel and see that it was so. She had been living in a state of delusion—had begun by admiring Edgar Derwent's goodness and his cleverness, and then gradually allowed her whole thoughts, and at last her whole heart, to be engrossed by an unselfish, humble devotion to him which neither expected nor wished for the least return or acknowledgment. Long before she knew him she was aware of his engagement to his cousin, and she could dwell with satisfaction on the thought of Annie's affection for him, and the prospect of his future happiness at Holmwood. There are women with tender and unambitious hearts who would willingly accept very scanty crumbs of happiness for themselves; who, if they could see (so at least they fancy) the object of their affections now and then, hear a kind word from him, and above all labour and toil in his service, would be quite content to leave to another the higher treasures of mutual affection which they have never ventured to covet. While Ita was working for Edgar, and learning from him, while she paid him the homage of an enthusiastic adoption of his views and opinions, and saw him perfectly satisfied both with Annie and herself, no clouds obscured her secret and innocent devotion to him. They began to arise, though she was hardly conscious of them, when she saw that he began to find in her the sort of sympathy Annie could not give him. This he never, of course, expressed in words, but he could not always conceal that he felt it. The fact was that Ita was the very woman to captivate him. Everything about her was feminine, winning, and soft, but there was a marvellous power of loving in that gentle heart, and an energy of will, which, like the tendrils of a delicate

plant, could force its way through every obstacle. When she saw he wished a thing done, it seemed as if nothing could stop her—she went straight at it with a resistless impetuosity, which a word or a look from him, however, would instantaneously check and direct. It was her delight to execute difficult things when he had suggested them. There was in her character naturally a strong desire to please, and with one whom she looked up to and loved, it easily became a passion. The slightest shade of displeasure or disappointment on his face she could not endure; and it did surprise her to see that Annie *could* thwart him, and *could* say before him things he did not like. She did not know, however, that sometimes afterwards Annie cried bitterly in secret because they did not and could not agree, and often felt a pang which no one knew or guessed at, when she watched Ita listening to him like an oracle, and flushing with excitement when his favourite subjects were discussed.

Annie did not think herself capable of helping her cousin as Ita did. She was profoundly diffident of her own capabilities, and sensitively afraid of putting herself forward. She longed, for instance, to copy for him when she found another did so, but half through pride, half through shyness, she could not bring herself to offer it. Ita wrote such a good hand, and she knew always where to find the books he wanted. She could not bear to propose to do what she might fail in. It was the same about the poor people, she seemed always to give them more or less than he would have advised. She was not at her ease with them, and sick persons used to ask anxiously, within her hearing, if Miss Flower would soon come to see them.

This had all tacitly been going on for some time, but to not one of the three had any defined discontent,

hope, wish, or regret occurred till a few days before the one when Eliza Conway paid the above-mentioned morning visit to Ita. Perhaps Annie was the first who had seen clearly what was the real state of the case. She had looked it in the face, and owned to herself with an aching heart, that she did not suit Edgar, that she was not the wife fitted for him. But there was Holmwood. It must be his. She would have given up all her own happiness, but she could not deprive him of Holmwood, for he was getting to love it every day more. Mr. Pratt had been getting gradually weaker during the winter, and Edgar had often been called upon to assist his curate. By Mrs. Gerald's express desire he had also begun to manage Annie's property. The interest he took in this occupation gave her the greatest delight. They rode together over the estate, looking at the farms, examining the state of the crops, settling what trees were to be planted or cut down, and what new cottages built. This, at least, was an enjoyment nobody but herself could give him, and on that thought she rested with satisfaction, and also on the hope that when once they were married, and Ita had left the neighbourhood, she would learn to be more useful to Edgar. She should not feel so shy about it when the contrast was no longer before her eyes of her own awkwardness, and another person's efficiency. On hearing, however, in an unexpected manner that she intended to settle down as a Sister of Charity at Bramblemoor, a jealous pang seized her. For a moment she felt indignant. The frank avowal which immediately followed of Ita's gratitude to Edgar, and of her own wish on that account to remain in the neighbourhood, dispelled her resentment, but not her uneasiness. Both she and Ita were humble each in their way. It was a singular instance in two such different persons of an equally un-

selfish attachment for the same person. Sometimes, perhaps, it crossed Ita's mind that she could have made Edgar happier than Annie did or ever would do; but she not only recoiled from the idea as from a sin, but felt it would be a misfortune, a terrible misfortune, if he should like her better than his cousin. She could not brook the idea—Holmwood, beautiful Holmwood, before her eyes as before Annie's, ever stood coupled with the thought that it must be his. Till Mr. Hendon made that passing remark to her, she had allowed herself to think that she might live at Bramblemoor, working among Edgar's poor, looking after his school, hearing him preach, sharing his interests, copying his manuscripts, though there would be no more intercourse between him and her than between him and Miss Conway, or any Sunday-school teacher in the parish. She liked the idea of belonging to a sisterhood, because it would cut her off from all opportunities of meeting him in society. She did not see even the shadow of anything wrong in making him the object of a secret worship, provided neither he, nor Annie, nor any one in the world knew of it. She had not yet learnt the fallacy and the danger of these secret indulgences of unavowed feelings, however pure and unselfish they may be.

But Mr. Hendon's words dispelled the whole fabric of her hopes and her illusions, and threw her into a strange disturbance. Others had seen that Edgar cared for her—perhaps that she cared for him. She felt guilty, miserable, almost as angry as it was in her nature to be; and then an involuntary joy flashed across the gloom. So then, perhaps, he did love her; but if so, there was certain misery in store for him. It could never be a right or a happy love; for he was bound to marry Annie, and she must go away. There was the sting—there the terrible pang—the blank

future. A separation for a given time from any one we love is to be borne; but to go where no natural ties give a prescriptive right to hope we shall meet again—to cast future existence in a new mould which will sever it for ever from the past—this is very like death. And as Lady Emily Hendon grew worse, and the shadows of the grave gathered visibly around her declining form, the young heart that watched that slow decay—the close of which was to be the end of the new life it had lately known—seemed invaded also with the chill heavy gloom of approaching dissolution.

It was a melancholy deathbed. There was in it little regret for anything on earth; but little care or thought of anything beyond it. The flame slowly expired with many a flicker. The man of the world, the man of letters on the one hand, and, on the other, the young girl who scarcely knew how to suggest to a dying person any of the new ideas and principles she had herself recently acquired, watched side by side. No one sent for the clergyman; it was not much the custom to do so when Mr. Hendon and Lady Emily were young. "To keep her quiet," was the doctor's injunction; and quietly as she had lived, so quietly she died. Mr. Hendon, when she had breathed her last, said, "*Requiescat in pace.*" He was one of those men who have had glimpses of Catholic truth, theoretic perceptions of the beauty of the Church, poetical sympathies with some of her tenets, and who suppose that if there is any true religion it must be Catholicism. And so he breathed that prayer by the remains of poor Lady Emily, and comforted, as well as he could, the weeping girl who had lost her only friend.

CHAPTER X.

Lady Emily's death was followed within a few days by Mr. Pratt's. She had breathed her last on Holy Saturday, and on Low Sunday he expired. Annie was with him during the greater part of the last day of his life. He retained his full consciouness to the end, and made her read to him verses of the Bible and the hymns he had taught her when she was a little child. Once he laid his hand on her head as she was sorrowfully kneeling by his bed-side, and said, "Miss Annie, do not give up the Bible whatever you do. When I am dead, take my Bible home with you. It has been my comfort for seventy years. Stick to it, my dear child, and do not listen to human inventions. Never mind about the Church, the Bible is all we want."

As Annie looked at his peaceful face she thought it seemed, indeed, to have been enough for his spiritual wants. Was she right? God only knows! To some gentle, pious souls He conveys graces through the scanty channels of an imperfect faith, when it is sincere and humble. But was it all *she* would ever want? Is the silent page, the voiceless teaching, the sacred but mysterious text, enough to carry a human soul through doubts, and fears, and temptations, along the difficult paths of life? Annie thought so then; but she was only on the threshold of life; and, as she walked back across the park on the day of her old friend's death and clasped his last bequest to her heart

and looked up at the clear expanse of the moonlit sky, Cowper's lines, which she had been reading a few days before, recurred to her memory:

> "Oh how unlike the complex work of man,
> Heaven's own artless, unencumbered plan;
> No meretricious graces to beguile,
> No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
> Like the cerulean arch we see,
> Majestic in its own simplicity."

She had a vague feeling that they applied to the present subject of her thoughts, that they expressed her sympathy with the simple Protestantism of poor Mr. Pratt's creed over what seemed to her the elaborate details and complicated doctrines of Edgar's favourite system. Whatever might be the merits or the defects of the latter, the simplicity of the former might, perhaps, have been justly compared to the mist which hangs over a glorious view, or the haze which conceals from sight the multitudinous beauties of the starry sky. Do not the admirers of what is called a simple form of religion make the mistake which Madame de Stael speaks of when she says, "Ils prennent le néant pour la profondeur." [1]

On her return, she found Edgar in the drawing-room at Holmwood. He looked pale and tired; and, after inquiring after her health, and saying kind words about Mr. Pratt and the grief she must feel at the loss of so old a friend, he sank back into an arm-chair with a weary look of fatigue and suffering. He looked still more tired in mind than in body.

"Have you been to Marchbanks to-day?" Annie asked, as she poured out some tea for him and Mrs. Gerald, for they had dined early.

"Yes, I went there this afternoon. The funeral, you know, took place yesterday."

[1] They mistake nothingness for depth.

"Yes; it is so sad these two deaths coming so close one upon another. Poor Lady Emily! she is not a person who will be much missed by anybody, except, of course, by dear Ita. How did you find her?"

"She does not say much, but I am sure she suffers. Have you been to her, Annie?"

"Only once this week. All my time has been taken up with Mr. Pratt. Edgar, he died so calmly, so happily; surely any one might be glad to be as good as he was."

"We might any of us be glad to be as good as your poor friend, but this does not imply that we can be content to ignore great truths which he did not discern."

Annie looked up, and said, "Yes, I suppose the knowledge of truth should be our aim. We ought at any price to wish to know the truth. Do not you think so, Aunt Gerald?"

"What are you alluding to, my love? Religious truths?"

"Not those alone. I think we ought to care for truth in everything."

"Of course," Mrs. Gerald replied quickly, but with a vague uneasiness. She thought Annie's manner strange, and did not know what to make of it. She was still more surprised when, after the tea-things were taken away, she got up, and said in a low voice—

"Dearest Aunt, I want to speak with Edgar alone. Shall I go into the library with him, or would you rather go yourself upstairs?"

"I will leave you here," Mrs. Gerald answered, and the cousins remained alone together.

They began by speaking of the arrangements about the funeral, and then Annie asked Edgar how soon he would be able to take possession of the living. He

told her that the bishop had kindly offered to make an exception in his favour, and admit him at once to priest's orders. He should have to go for that purpose early the following week to the bishop's palace, and immediately afterwards he should settle at the Vicarage. He had also seen Lord Carsdale, who had promised, in case he wished to resign the living of Bramblemoor, to give it to Mr. Roland, who would then marry Eliza.

In alluding to that circumstance, Edgar said, "If they were married, Miss Flower could stay with them for a while at least. I know they wish it. It is of the utmost consequence she should not go abroad again at present."

"What is she intending to do?"

"I think she means to go to Mentone."

"I shall speak to her about it."

"Will you?"

"Yes. I shall go and see her to-morrow."

Annie, after she had said this, got up and went to the writing-table, as if looking for something; she then came back, and with a great effort said, "I wish people spoke the truth to one another. Edgar, I wish I knew something."

Edgar looked at her earnestly, and said, "What?"

"It would be so much better if I knew the truth. Will you promise me, if I put to you a question, that you will answer it plainly and truly?"

Edgar looked agitated. "You do not suppose, Annie," he said, that I should not always speak the truth to you or anybody else."

"But there are times when it is difficult to say what is true."

Annie stopped short, and, resting her forehead on her hand and her elbows on the table, did not speak for some time. She felt that it was a most important

step she was going to take, unadvised, on her own responsibility. It seemed doubtful whether, after the words she was going to utter, their mutual happiness could ever be what it might still be if she kept silent. At last, in the same position, without raising her head, she said, "which do you think would make a man happiest—to marry somebody he loved very much, whom he was in love with, and be poor; or one he did not care so much about, who was rich?"

She was surprised at the firmness with which Edgar answered: "It would depend on the man's character and on the character of the women you are supposing him to choose between."

She did not know how to proceed, but after another pause she said: "Edgar, it is of no use beating about the bush—you must not be angry with me—but tell me really, truly, as honestly as I ask you the question, Would it make you happier to marry Ita than to marry me?"

Edgar turned as pale as death. Could he say *no* with truth? Yes he could say "no," for he should never forgive himself if he said "yes;" and in that case remorse would embitter the rest of his life. "No, dear Annie," he quietly replied, whilst his heart was beating quickly, and his lips quivering.

She suddenly raised her head and looked at him. It was impossible to mistake the expression of misery in his face; and when his eyes met hers, and he tried to smile, she saw the desperate effort it cost him, and exclaimed: "Oh, be sincere with me, Edgar! It is all I ask, all I wish. You know I am not accusing you. God knows, I do not wonder at it . . . ."

"At what, Annie, at what? You are dreaming, you are talking at random. Nothing is changed between us, nothing is different. I love you as I have always loved you."

"Yes, I believe it," she answered sorrowfully. "I believe it, dear Edgar. But you never have and you never will—forgive me, be patient with me, do not interrupt me—you never will love me as you would love Ita, if you did not think it wrong to do so."

"Annie, Annie, how can you, how dare you speak in that way? How dare you have such a thought? What a foolish jealousy!"

"I am not jealous. I wish I was, for then, perhaps, the feeling would pass away, and all might remain between us as before. But you are too truthful, too just to deceive me. Come, Edgar, can you tell me . . . ."

"I can tell you that never has the thought of such a marriage crossed my mind—that I have been true and faithful in my affection for you—that I love you with all my heart, my own dear cousin, my own dearest Annie, my promised wife . . . ."

"Yes; every word you say is true. I have no doubt of it. But is not this true also? Have you not felt that, had you met Ita before you were engaged to me, she was the woman in all the world you would have liked best? Have you not thought that you would have been very glad if I had been more like her? Does not she think with you, work for you, help you in a way I can never do? Have I not heard you say, Edgar, that it is the greatest blessing in the world when a husband and wife agree about religion, and do I not every day feel more, perhaps never so much as to-day, that we do not and never can agree on some important subjects? Have you not made Ita adopt every one of your ideas whilst I differ from them more and more? Edgar, if you were free, would you not marry Ita?"

"I have never thought of any one as a wife but you, Annie. But if you wish to break off our engagement I ought not to dissuade you from it. I have

always felt that it was hardly fair that you should marry your all but penniless cousin when you might have done so much better for yourself, as people say."

Annie looked pained. "It is not kind to put it in that way," she answered, and after a few moments' silence, said: "Edgar, I have perhaps been very foolish. Will you forgive me and forget what I have said to-night?"

"Certainly, dear Annie, though I must own, I wish you had spared me the pain it has given me."

"I do everything clumsily and ill," she thought, when she had left the room. "I said too much and too little. I have caused him suffering and myself too. Nothing is better than it was, a great deal is worse, and the worst of it is that I do not see my way out of it."

A few days after the funeral, Edgar went to the Episcopal Palace at——, and Annie took the opportunity of his absence to drive over to Marchbanks. She had been turning over in her mind whether she ought or not to invite Ita to Holmwood. It would look very unkind not to do so, but after speaking to Edgar in the way she had done, it had become, to say the least of it, very awkward. She wished she had put off saying anything to him till she had seen them together at Holmwood. At breakfast, on the morning he had left, Mrs. Gerald had proposed to fix a day for their marriage. Neither of them made any answer, and the subject had dropped. He went away, and she avoided going into her aunt's room, or being alone with her lest she should renew it. However, on her way to Marchbanks she came to the conclusion that it would be, on the whole, well to invite Ita. Perhaps more than anything else this would serve to do away with the effect of what she had said to Edgar.

When Annie's pony-chaise drove up to the entrance

door at Marchbanks, she saw Ita sitting under the same tree where they had met and conversed for the first time the year before. It seemed so very long ago, so much had happened since then. She was looking pale and delicate in her deep mourning, and was naturally very much out of spirits. When Annie asked her if she had made any plans, she answered: "Yes, Mr. Hendon is going abroad in about three weeks, and he will take me as far as Mentone; I shall spend a few months there with some of my friends, and then afterwards I shall settle my plans for the future."

"Have you quite given up that scheme about Sisters of Charity at Bramblemoor?"

"Yes; quite."

"I am glad of it. Those sisterhoods are stupid things."

"I think it is a very beautiful kind of life, but I must go abroad."

"I hope, dear Ita, that you will spend a few days with us before you go. It would give Mrs. Gerald and me so much pleasure."

"Would it?" Ita said, her eyes filling with tears. "I should like it very much."

"Then will you come as soon as you can?"

"Very well, I will. Mr. Hendon is going to London in about ten days, and I was to have remained here alone till I joined him, so I shall be glad to be with you."

Then they talked of other things, and Annie returned home, well satisfied that she had done what was right. Edgar was soon established at the Vicarage. As her old friend had bequeathed to Annie all his furniture and books, there was but little change in the aspect of the old house. The bee-hives remained as before in sight of the windows, scarcely a chair or a table

was moved out of its place, and yet within a very few days it would have been easy to tell that the little abode had passed into other hands. Other prints, other pictures, other books adorned the walls and filled the shelves, displacing the old ones, or throwing them into the shade. Mr. Pratt's old cook stood aghast when she saw a crucifix in her new master's room; rumours of the Popish doings at Bramblemoor had, indeed, reached Holmwood, but anything as bad as that she had never thought to see in dear Mr. Pratt's own bed-room. What a strange superstition it is which has made the picture of our blessed Lord an object of dread and horror to those who think they love Him!

It was on the 15th of May that Ita was to come to Holmwood for a week, on her way to London. The spring was at that moment in all its glory—the leaves quite out, and every tree and shrub, from the horse-chesnut to the white lilac, in full bloom; the garden one blaze of brilliant blossoms; the fields and woods one mass of violets, blue hyacinths, and cowslips; everything gay, fresh, and sweet—the birds singing their little throats out; the insects like living gems; the butterflies like flying flowers hovering over the gaudy beds, and haunting the sunny nooks of the old-fashioned garden.

As Annie sat on the lawn in the midst of all that fresh loveliness and fragrant beauty, there was a strange, anxious sense in her heart of what that week would bring forth. The last words of Montrose's love song came into her mind:—

> "I'll dare to put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all."

Yes; to lose all herself—she was willing to accept that issue—but was she to mar Edgar's destiny by visiting upon him her jealous susceptibility of what, if it existed

at all, was probably only a transient fancy—no decided preference—no real attachment? She resolved to be calm, to be silent, to watch. She prayed to see the truth, and nothing but the truth. And by her side was another anxious heart also questioning itself; also holding one of those inward courts of justice, where two sides of a difficult case are argued before the unhappy judge, who is at the same time plaintiff, defendant, and arbiter of a vexed question. Poor Mrs. Gerald, she too was looking to that last visit of Ita's with a nervous apprehension. The sound of carriage-wheels made her start; but the first to arrive, of the little party expected that day, was Eliza Conway. Annie had sent the pony-chaise for her, and she looked as happy as well could be when, a few minutes afterwards, a fly drove up to the door, and her future husband, Mr. Roland, got out of it. They were to be married in a few weeks in London, and then to settle in the tiny parsonage at Bramblemoor. Both had been working very hard in their respective spheres, and living on hopes which were now about to be realized. It was, indeed, one of those moments which do not often occur in the course of a lifetime—to spend several days of well-earned repose in the midst of the beautiful works of God, at the loveliest season of the year; together resting from virtuous labours, together looking forward to a future of usefulness, peace, and happiness. There was not a cloud, apparently, in that horizon—not one they were conscious of themselves—one there was nevertheless, small as a man's hand as yet, but big with dangers, trials, and blessings they little dreamed of whilst strolling on that green lawn, on which the declining sun was beginning to throw its yellow light and long shadows. They had never met before, except in London, and it seemed strange to Eliza to see Mr. Roland anywhere but in

an alley, or a school, or the dingy drawing-room in Bryanston Square. It was pleasant to show him that place she loved so well—to be looking at flowers, running water, and a sunset sky with him whom she knew to be like herself, thanking God, in his heart, for every one of them.

There was nothing romantic in Mr. Roland's appearance. His face was plain, but had that kindliness of expression, which Sir Walter Scott says is like sunshine on an ugly country—it beautifies with its light what would be otherwise uninteresting. His manner, from shyness, was a little awkward; but its perfect simplicity made it almost engaging.

It was not till an hour after Eliza and Mr. Roland had arrived that Mr. Hendon's carriage drove up the avenue, and Ita appeared. There is a singular power in youth to dismiss at times all thought of the future—to think of a few days as of a whole lifetime to come—to live in the present hour as if it was never to end. This was the case that day with Ita. She had been miserable at the thought of leaving England without seeing Edgar again, which at one moment had seemed likely. If Annie had not invited her, she would perhaps have been obliged to go to London with Mr. Hendon; but now she had before her a week in which she could enjoy, and enjoy without self-reproach, the happiness of his society. Had she not been going away for good, she should have thought it wrong to feel this pleasure; she would have questioned if it was right to put herself in the way of seeing him; but now it could not signify, he was not Annie's husband yet. It was not wrong to take this joy, as a dying man tastes for the last time the food which is offered him. It would not be wrong to listen to each of his words and learn them by heart, so as to carry them away with her to muse upon during a life-long separation.

It was a pleasurable suffering, an acceptable anguish to feel to the uttermost the happiness of seeing him—of hearing his every word—and watching his every look with the consciousness that it was all to be for the last time; that memory was henceforward to be her world, and with a week before her she could accept this prospect, and the dreary blank beyond it.

Edgar's emotions were far more complicated. Before Annie had spoken to him, he had kept down with a strong hand the first symptoms of a more than friendly interest in Ita. He had not allowed himself to think it possible he could like her otherwise than was right in his position with regard to Annie. But, ever since the day when she had put to him that fatal question, the whole state of his mind was changed. The thought no longer seemed a sin—it could no longer be crushed like a forbidden thought—it would make itself heard. Her words were ever recurring to him, and with them the doubt whether a woman who really loved him would ever have put such a question—would have placed before him all the reasons why another would make him happier. His mind was in a turmoil of doubt and anxiety; he wished to do what was right; but his soul was sorely perplexed, and to some persons there is no trial in life to be compared to perplexity. They can do anything if they can feel confident they are doing what is right, or enduring what is inevitable. And this state of uncertainty was, moreover, peculiarly trying to Edgar, at a moment when he felt himself called upon to assume new responsibilities, and perform sacred duties, which more than any others required, he could not but feel it, a calm and even frame of mind. His resolutions to serve God and the Church were perfectly sincere, and he was determined to act rightly at any cost or self-sacrifice; but he had been driven, in some sense, into a posi-

tion in which he did not see quite clearly the line of duty.

Of all persons in the world, Edgar was the one most to dread an interior conflict, and now unconsciously on a question of morality, he found himself involved in it. Over and over again, during the last few days, had the question presented itself to him—a question to which no general answer can be given—one which, after all, must be judged by the circumstances of each separate case. "If a man has pledged his faith to a woman, and then becomes aware that, in spite of himself, he cares for another more than he does for her, or at least that his more ardent and tender feelings are all interested in that other person, is he bound, is he right, to marry one who expects and thinks he loves her wholly, solely, and entirely? Is it fidelity or deceit, is it justice or injustice, in such a case, to adhere to a plighted troth?" Edgar would have had no doubt as to the answer in his own case, if, as has already been said, Annie had not spoken to him first. When, before that day, the thought had crossed his mind that Ita would have been, of all women in the the world, the one he could have most passionately admired and loved—that she was his ideal of what a clergyman's wife should be, with her deep piety, her gentle submissiveness, her ardent love of the poor, her sympathy with all that is beautiful, and holy, and great in a life of poverty and self-sacrifice—he indignantly drove such dreams away, even as he would have done had they arisen after his marriage. But Annie's question had broken down the barrier, had changed their position. It had, in fact, transformed a dream into a reality, a shadow into a substance. Now he must more or less deceive, if he was to reassure her—now he must be acting a part. Either he must request her never again to allude to that subject, and

then there would be something between their hearts, something they did not speak of, something that would be always to both a painful thought; or else, if she recurred to it again, he must actually deceive her: for, since the day when he could really with truth have told her that the idea of loving and marrying any woman but her had never crossed his mind, the state of the case was changed. The once unconscious inclination had made giant strides. The words, "Should you be happier if you married Ita than if you married me?" were continually in his thoughts. The idea, once suggested, kept rising before him as a possibility, and the answer which his throbbing heart gave to it was unmistakable. From the moment he allowed himself to think of it, there could be no doubt on the subject. On the one hand there was Annie, handsome, good, devotedly attached to him; and, together with her, wealth, position, and the possession of the place he had always been passionately fond of, and with which all the day-dreams of his life were connected. On the other, there was this nameless girl, with her unknown parentage, her strange history, her friendless position, her comparative poverty; and he did not hesitate, he did not doubt, he was certain that if he could be sure he was not wronging Annie or acting unworthily, he should accept with ecstasy the prospect of foregoing every worldly advantage, and marrying Ita. To have her as his wife in any little parsonage in any obscure village—to see her going in and out of the cottages in her grey gown and straw bonnet—to have her by his side, writing for him, reading with him, saving with him out of their poverty means to build a school or to erect a new altar for their church—was a vision he dared not dwell upon.

If he had not kept these thoughts at bay, the point must have been decided—his and Annie's fate must

have been sealed—not that he felt at all sure that Ita would marry him; that was another thought that sometimes troubled Edgar. It seemed to him mean to adhere to his engagement to Annie just because the result of breaking it off might not lead to his marrying Ita. Sometimes he thought the most honourable course would be to give up Annie and Holmwood and Ita, and seek some employment in the Colonies. Perhaps this was really what struck him as the most proper thing to do under the circumstances, and the prominent idea in his mind when he agreed to Annie's wish that he should come and stay with them during the week that Ita was to spend at Holmwood. It was a bargain he made with his conscience. He should give himself this chance, he should be able now to test his own feelings. He had not seen much of Ita in this kind of life. Perhaps he might find that, after all, his imagination had exaggerated the interest he took in her, and that, especially at Holmwood, and in the position he occupied there, as Annie's future husband, the illusion might vanish. He should also be able to observe how far Annie was suspicious or anxious on the subject, and whether much importance should be attached to what she had said. At all events, that week would make things more clear; he should see his way better at the end of it than he did then. If the worst came to the worst, he would go to Australia. In the meantime, he went to Holmwood.

CHAPTER XI.

Nobody would have guessed, during the days which Ita spent at Holmwood, what agitating, or, at any rate, anxious thoughts were occupying the minds of three at least out of the six persons staying there. The elasticity of youth, and its strange power of forgetting the future when the present is agreeable, enabled them, in spite of recent sorrow, melancholy anticipations, and inward struggles, not only to appear, but sometimes to be, in good spirits.

Annie had arranged a variety of drives and excursions for almost every day of Ita's visit, and had particularly begged Edgar to consider this time as one of rest, and made a point he should meet them at least wherever they spent the noontide hours, whether in a pretty farmhouse in a distant part of the estate, or in a lovely spot in a secluded valley, or at the summit of some hill commanding a fine view. If she had wished to show Ita off to advantage, she could not have hit upon a better expedient, for she was one of those persons who throw a charm over the least little details of life, and find amusement for themselves and others in everything said and done in their presence. She had an original way of looking at subjects, which was as amusing almost as wit, and enjoyed so thoroughly her own enjoyment and that of others, that her gaiety was catching. Foreigners say that English people *s'amusent tristement*, now Ita amused herself *gaiement*, and this makes all the difference on these sort of occasions.

She looked particularly pretty, too, sitting amongst the fern-leaves and the heather; she ran so lightly up and down the hills, and did everything so gracefully. Whether she played with a child, patted a dog, or caught up a kitten in her arms, there was always something to look at, to watch, to smile at, to be amused or pleased with in Ita. Now and then a look of sorrow passed over her bright face, like one of the white clouds in the blue sunshiny sky; but, like that cloud, it soon disappeared, and she was full again of her little jokes and innocent glee. Annie felt, and even the engaged couple, who were staying with her, felt that half their pleasure would have been lost on these days of rest, sunshine, and flowers, if Ita had not been with them. And what did Edgar feel? He did not allow himself to think of the future—whilst she was there, whilst she was before him, he could not fix his thoughts on what was to follow. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," "and the joy thereof," he said to himself; and he made no plans, formed no resolutions, was kind and attentive to Annie, paid no outward attentions to Ita, and often prayed that, whatever he might have to suffer, neither of them might suffer through him.

Mrs. Gerald was restless and sometimes irritable. It annoyed her that, whenever she spoke to Annie of fixing a day for her marriage, she changed the subject. One morning of that week she came into her niece's room, and said in a nervous hurried manner, "Annie, will you be so good as to tell me what your intentions are about your marriage, because, as my plans depend upon it, I should like to know what you mean to do."

"But does it really signify to you," Annie answered, "whether it is a fortnight or three weeks, or three months, sooner or later?"

"It does signify to me. I shall go abroad as soon as you are married, and I want to know when I can get away."

"Get away!" Annie repeated. "You have never spoken before, Aunt Gerald, of getting away from me."

Mrs. Gerald forced a smile and said, "You have never been married yet, Annie."

"With whom shall you go abroad?"

"I may perhaps join Mr. Hendon and Ita; but I do not want anybody to travel with me."

The blood rushed to Annie's cheeks and her heart beat with violence. She had never been apparently extremely fond of her aunt; children who have been very much spoilt, seldom do love in a tender manner those who have made them idols; but Mrs. Gerald had been devoted to her from her infancy, she was so used to be worshipped by her that the bare thought of her caring for anybody but herself was new and insupportable. Even Edgar's admiration for Ita had not caused her the jealous pang she felt when her aunt spoke of *getting away from her*, and joining that girl abroad, whom in a transport of anger she felt at that moment as if she could have stabbed. Yes, Annie had those violent impulses; there was no vivacity, but a great deal of violence in her nature. It had not been called forth by anything that had to do with Edgar. She had always thought herself unworthy of him, always had misgivings whether she could make him happy. Though an heiress, though a spoilt child, she had been profoundly humble in her estimate of herself as far as he was concerned. But her aunt, her slave she might have truly said, though the ugly word did not suggest itself, that she should think any one an object in life but herself, that she should wish to go to a distance from her, and not be content to stay within reach in case she should have any occasion for her tenderness

or her care: this seemed monstrous, unnatural; and, when Ita's name was uttered, it was like a spark falling on tinder. "I am not going to hurry on my marriage to please any one," she exclaimed; "and if you wish to go abroad with Ita, you can go. I can take care of myself.

Mrs. Gerald fixed her eyes upon her and sighed deeply. "Annie, Annie," she said after a moment's silence, "My Annie, do not speak in that way; we can none of us take care of ourselves. God help us! He only knows what may happen to any of us. Annie darling, do not be captious, do not play with your own happiness; believe me long engagements are foolish things. Fix the day of your marriage."

Annie was softened; she laid her head on her aunt's shoulder, and said, "Why will you leave me, Aunt Gerald? Nobody will ever love me as you do, and you must not love anybody but me."

Mrs. Gerald burst into tears and threw her arms round her niece, kissing her over and over again with a vehement, passionate fondness; and then, returning to the charge, spoke again about her marriage.

"Well, Aunt Gerald, I cannot fix anything to-day; but I promise you—yes, it is to-day, Friday—this day week I will settle all about it. But I will not let you go abroad."

Mrs. Gerald said, "We shall see about that too on Friday week."

Sunday came, and Edgar preached for the first time in Holmwood Church. His sermon was on the words of the Gospel, "If thy right eye offend thee pluck it out." He spoke well, eloquently, powerfully on the subject which those words suggested. Once or twice his voice faltered a little, or at least Annie fancied it did so, when he said that in the lives of most men and women there was a moment when a decision had to be

taken which was likely to influence their fate for time and perhaps for eternity; an hour when there was a hand to be cut off, an eye to be plucked out; and if they lost heart, if they failed and shrunk from the self-inflicted suffering, even should they escape the fires of hell, their earthly destiny would prove but a miserable failure, a hopeless mistake. He said it made him tremble to think how sometimes a whole future of greatness or of shame, of virtue or of crime, turned on one decision, on one act of a poor, weak, blinded, infatuated human will. How angels and devils must watch with eager hope and fear the debate which goes on in the mind of one who stands, knife in hand, longing and not daring to sever the offending limb which is dragging him down into perdition. He said "Temptation" was the grandest thing in the world, because it gave man the opportunity of using the greatest gift of God. That when, in the magnificence of his free will, he flung from him the object on which every passion of his soul was bent, and plucked out of the aching socket the eye dearer to him than life, he became a worthy spectacle for angels and for men, one of the glorious band who have fought and overcome.

"I will be of that number," the preacher felt as he uttered those stirring words, and resolved to crush in his soul every feeling untrue to his plighted troth. "I will be of that number," murmured one of his hearers as she thought of the temptation which had been besetting her of coveting for herself the love which was another's due. She had drunk in the eloquent words Edgar had uttered; she felt ready to march to the scaffold, if needs be, or to the stake any day. But, in the ardour of self-sacrifice, a thought crossed her mind which caused a terrible reaction in her heroic emotions. A troublesome guardian angel, eager to test their reality, or, may be, an evil spirit, jealous of their con-

tinuance, whispered, "Leave Holmwood to-morrow; give up those last three days of dangerous happiness, of inevitable temptation." Alas! the whisper was most unwelcome; the suggestion quelled at once the generous excitement; two or three times in the course of the day the thought recurred, but was met with an offer of compromise. She would not say a word or give a look which her conscience might blame; but why should she leave her friends? why make herself miserable? why not accept the short happiness which could injure no one but herself?

Annie had heard that sermon too. Her cheeks had not flushed, her heart had not beat fast, but it had made an impression on her also. She had been watching, she had been thinking, and every day made her more certain that Edgar liked Ita, and that she liked him. They had behaved very well, they had talked very little together, and scarcely looked at each other at all. Edgar had been more gentle, kind, and affectionate to herself than he had ever been before; but she had observed his face when Ita was singing, she had seen him start when she passed near him, leave the room suddenly when she came in, and change colour whenever any allusion to her departure was made. Once, when she mentioned some Catholic friends of hers abroad, he had exclaimed in an unguarded manner that it would make him miserable if she went to live with them, and then had seemed confused and grieved at the vehemence with which he had spoken. Annie once thought of consulting Eliza, but her pride could not endure to take another into her confidence on this subject. No, she should act for herself and by herself.

She took a walk alone that Sunday afternoon. Mr. Roland and Eliza had gone in the pony-chaise to Bramblemoor for the afternoon service; Mrs. Gerald

she had left lying on her sofa in the bed-room with a headache; what Ita was doing she did not know: but it did not signify. She felt she must spend some hours alone, she would not go to church again, she would say her prayers in the wood. So when the bell for the afternoon service was ringing, and Edgar had gone across the lawn into the churchyard, she walked to the grove, which went by the name of The Forest, and sitting down on the trunk of a tree, she began to think. Her meditations were singularly matter of fact. A romantic person would have wondered at the uninteresting manner in which she set about planning an act of heroic unselfishness. "It is of no use to think any more about it. He likes her, there can be no doubt of that, and so he must marry her. They will live at the Vicarage, which is almost like Holmwood, and, as I shall never marry, some day he will have this place. I am younger than he is, that is the worst of it; but if he dies before me it will go to his children, and in the meantime I can help them in all sorts of ways. I can new-furnish their house. They can have game and fruit, and all they want from the farm and the garden. It will be almost as if Holmwood belonged to him. What I want to make Edgar understand is, that I love him and will love him as much as ever I did, and yet that I shall not be a bit unhappy at his marrying Ita. I like to love him in this sort of way better than to be his wife—at least I think so."

Some large tears had gathered in her eyes and were falling on the blue hyacinths with which she had been filling her lap. "If he had liked me as I see he likes Ita, that, I suppose, would have been the greatest happiness of all. I had just an idea of it at the time when it was settled that we were to be married. He used to look so pleased when we were walking up and

down the terrace and talking of the future. But next to that what I shall like best is, that he should be happy with her. She always thinks everything he does is right, and never contradicts him. I am not like that; I could never give up my own opinions as she does. Some months ago she thought nothing so dull as the English service, and now she can never go to church often enough. The thing is to find some way of bringing all this about. I set about it so badly before, and I am always so stupid."

A long fit of musing ensued, during which a few more tears fell from Annie's eyes. Yet it was true that she did not feel very unhappy; at any rate, it was a better sort of unhappiness than the misgivings she had so often felt as to the possibility of making Edgar happy, of being the sort of wife which would suit him.

Four o'clock struck at the stable clock, and she thought the service must be over. She had not said any prayers yet, and she tried to read the Psalms for the day; but her mind wandered very much, and she soon fell again into a brown study. The sound of a footstep made her look round, and she saw Edgar coming towards her. She went to meet him, but said nothing of what was in her mind. He told her that he was going to London the next day, and should not return till the end of the week. She understood at once that he was practising what he had preached in the morning, plucking out the right eye, cutting off the right foot. He smiled and spoke cheerfully; but she felt he was suffering, and longed with a vehement longing to make him happy, to break through all reserve, to force him to stay. But to Annie nothing was so difficult as to speak; she did not know how to begin, it was so difficult after the way in which her first attempt had failed. So she ended by saying

nothing, and, as soon as they reached the house, went up to her room, and did not go as usual to Mrs. Gerald's sitting-room at five o'clock for tea.

At dinner Mr. Roland said to Edgar, "By what train do you go to-morrow?"

"The seven o'clock one," he answered.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Gerald asked.

"To London."

"And when do you come back?"

"Not till Saturday," he replied.

Ita was to leave Holmwood on the Thursday, and Marchbanks on the Friday. Annie looked at her, and observed that she turned pale. Three whole days she *had* reckoned upon, after that she knew all would be over; but now it seemed more than she could bear. He was doing what she had not had the courage to do. There was shame as well as sorrow in her heart. She ought to have been the one to go. An intolerable fear crossed her mind that she had let him see that she cared for him, and that he was going in consequence. There was no time now for anything; she should have to say good-bye to him, when the candles were being lighted, and everybody standing near the door. She had meant, before they parted, to ask his advice about many things; to get him, for instance, to give her a list of books. She had hoped to treasure up many a token of the past—those little helps, which soften the sickening pain of separation, which leave something for the heart to rest on till it has become inured to loneliness. Even in the greatest grief, casual circumstances have a strange power of increasing or alleviating suffering; and in some sorrows, those which come from quick feelings and a lively imagination, it is wonderful the difference they make. Ita thought that if she had been able to tell Edgar before they parted that she thanked him for what he had taught her; that

all her future life would be influenced by the advice and the instruction she had received from him; that she would never forget the little church of Bramblemoor, and hoped he would pray for her; and, at the last moment, he could have spoken some kind words to her, and she could have heard him say, just as she was going away, "God bless you," that then her suffering would be tolerable. She had made up her mind to bear such a parting as that. So that it was attended by these alleviations, it seemed as if she could endure it. But now irritation, intense disappointment, nervous dread of having in some way or other committed herself, were rankling in her heart, and putting all gentle, soothing feelings to flight.

When Edgar and Mr. Roland came into the drawing-room, she fancied the former was moving towards her. Partly from fear of seeming to expect it, and partly that she was really afraid of not being able to carry on an ordinary conversation with him, or, if they spoke of more interesting things, to do so in a calm manner, she did not look up but kept her eyes fixed on a book of prints. He sat down almost opposite to her. Mrs. Gerald was pasting pictures in a scrap-book, and Mr. Roland helping her to cut them out; in another part of the room, Annie and Eliza were playing some sacred music, so that it was almost like being alone with him. He put a little parcel before her, and said, "Will you let me give you this Prayer-book? I hope that wherever you are you will remain in communion of spirit with us."

She thanked him, and then tried to say something about his praying for her, but could not get out the words. She glanced at his present. It was the "Book of Common Prayer." Somehow at that moment she did not feel pleased with it; she wished he had given

her some other book, "The Imitation of Christ," or a "Bible," or even "The Christian Year."

Edgar said, after a moment's silence, "Annie will hear from you sometimes."

She did not answer. In spite of all her efforts to restrain them, tears were running down her cheeks. He saw those tears, and his whole countenance changed. His own sufferings he had endured with courage, but her grief made him feel quite beside himself. He could not remain sitting where he was, and yet could not bring himself to leave the room. He went and sat by Mrs. Gerald, with a face so pale and a look of such misery that there was one other person present who could no longer brook it. "Now for it," Annie said to herself, "God help me. This must not go on."

She got up, and passing by him, said, "Edgar, come to the library. I want to speak to you."

"Will it not do when I come back?" he whispered. Each instant, even of suffering, seemed precious to him. "Would to Heaven," he thought, "she had let me remain here, doing nothing, for this last hour."

But she said, "No, it must be now;" and lighting a candle, she went across the hall into the dark library. He followed her, and stood against the chimney, while she sat down on one of the green leather sofas, and felt glad that the single candle gave so little light.

"Edgar," she said, in a firm voice—"Edgar, we must make an end of this misery. You *must* marry Ita."

"Oh, for God's sake, for pity's sake," he exclaimed, with some violence, "do not begin again about that, to-night, at least. I am ill, Annie. I am not up to another such conversation as we had before on that subject."

"It shall not be another such conversation. Edgar, please understand me. What I mean is that it would

be very wrong, very unkind, now not to tell me the truth, to let me stand in the way of your happiness, when the only thing I have wanted all along was to make you happy. I might say that I had made up my mind not to marry you, and so leave you free. But I do not want to do it in that way. I want you to be happy and to let me help you to be happy now at once."

She had stood up and gone near him; and, before he was aware of it, had taken hold of his hand, and gently pressed her lips to it. She had never done this before; when she did it, he felt she was in earnest, and that all was changed in their relative positions.

"I can never marry you," she again repeated. "Our engagement is as much at an end as if it had never existed. But answer me this question—oh, I implore you, Edgar, do answer me, now that you are free, quite free, as free as if there had never been any question of your marrying *me*, would you, *do* you wish to marry Ita?"

Edgar had never wept since his childhood. It was a new, strange sensation to him—the strong emotion was forcing its way from his heart and shaking his frame with irresistible might. He sank down on the sofa, and burst into tears. Annie sat down by him, and waited till his agitation had subsided.

He said at last, "God is my witness that this has been all against my will; that I have fought, prayed, struggled against it—that this morning when I preached on the duty . . . ." There he broke off. He could not tell Annie that to have kept his troth to her would have been the hardest of sacrifices.

"It was not a sin," she answered. "If it had been a sin, I think God would have given you strength to conquer it. I am glad you did not conquer it, I am indeed. I am speaking the perfect truth. I don't

think I should have been happy as your wife, always thinking I did not suit you. But may I, may I tell Ita to-night before she goes to bed that she need not go away? She looks so pale, poor girl! So very pale and sad."

"Annie, you are too good. It is not right, it cannot be right. You have taken me by surprise. You must think of what other people will think and say."

"I do not care a straw about that; only are you sure you love her, and wish very much to marry her—that you do not mind about her having no family, no birth-place, as it were?"

"Alas! if I did not love her more perhaps than it is right to love anybody, I should not be reproaching myself as I do now for my conduct towards you, dearest, dearest Annie. I did not know till these last days, how much I cared for her. It is too dreadful, too abominable to say this to you."

"No, not at all. That is your mistake. The more you tell me you love her, the happier it makes me. It is a real comfort to me, Edgar."

"Well, I really did not know it, and when I found it out, I was resolved to crush the feeling, to drive it out of my soul; for if it was not exactly a sin, still it was wrong. It ought never to have been. But I thought to-night she did look very unhappy, and it almost broke my heart."

"And you do not mind about her birth—her being found alone in a boat at sea?"

A faint smile passed over Edgar's face. "If she had been found on a dunghill I should not care."

Those words, and the accent with which they were uttered, put an end to any lingering doubt in Annie's mind as to the degree to which he cared for Ita, and she said, "Then will you let me manage to make her a little bit happy to-night, just enough to cheer her up?

I think you had better still go to London as you intended. Telling Aunt Gerald will be the worst part of the business, and I had rather have her to myself."

"I really feel quite bewildered, Annie. It seems so strange, so sudden, so sad in some ways, and as if it could not be right. All we had thought of and looked forward to . . . ." he added, with a sigh.

She looked at him anxiously. "Edgar, will it . . . . I hope it will not be a great trial to you about Holmwood?"

"Oh, dearest Annie, the Vicarage . . . ." He stopped short; he could not tell *her* that with Ita the Vicarage would be a Paradise.

But she guessed what had passed through his mind, and exclaimed, "I am so glad now that you are a clergyman, though I never quite liked it till now. You and Ita will agree so well about everything. She will be, as you know, as High Church as you can wish. It is all so well, so right; it is just what ought to be . . . ."

There was a little nervousness, perhaps, in the way Annie kept reiterating these assurances. She did not seem unhappy, nor did she feel so, whilst under the influence of strong excitement. What had passed was, to a certain extent, a relief; what she had yet to do, a stimulant. The pain was to come afterwards. It was like a wound received in battle, there was no leisure to feel the smart.

Meanwhile, Ita was watching the clock in the drawing-room, and counting the minutes, as the hour advanced, and they did not return. She felt very miserable; it was such unsatisfactory wretchedness, unlike what she had made up her mind to bear. It seemed so hard that Annie should have taken him away just then, she who was going to be happy with him all her life. She might have supposed that, after working for Edgar and with him, and having been his

pupil, so to speak, for so long, she would wish to say a few parting words to him that evening. She did not call to mind then that, when he had tried to speak to her, she had been unable or unwilling to answer him. Now she would have given anything to have seen him sitting again at that table.

At last the door opened, and Annie came in, looking flushed and excited. She went to the tray, and poured out some wine and water, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing.

"Is it not time to go to bed?" she said.

"High time, I think," Mrs. Gerald answered, putting down her brush and shutting up her book.

Ita moved towards the door. She had seen Edgar look into the room and disappear: she thought he was perhaps waiting in the hall or on the stairs to say good-bye, but he was not anywhere to be seen. She went up to her room with a sick feeling of disappointment, and, throwing herself on the sofa, cried bitterly.

The door opened soon afterwards, and Annie came in. Neither of the two girls could, perhaps, have afterwards stated very exactly what passed between them during the next hour. Annie had said that Ita must not *mind* (her favourite phrase) her saying something very odd. She must tell her that a great change had happened. Ita sat up and looked at her as if she thought any change, as far as she was concerned, must be for the better. The tears were running down her cheeks, but she did not seem conscious of them.

"What change?" she asked, in a low voice.

"I am not going to marry my cousin. We have come to that decision, and I thought you would like to know it to-night from me, before other people are told. No one knows it but he and I."

At the first moment Ita did not feel glad. It had

never crossed her mind that, under any circumstances, she could herself marry Edgar. To live near him, and work for him, was all she had ever looked forward to; and her first idea was that, perhaps, it was a great blow to him that his marriage was broken off. She had a vague misgiving that it might somehow be her fault, and to cause suffering to any one, and to him in particular, was to her nature an intolerable trial.

"Is he unhappy? Has it pained him very much?" she asked, forgetting what a strange question that was to put to Annie.

"No, it is a great relief to both of us," she answered; "it is the best thing that could have happened."

"Whose fault has it been?"

"Nobody's fault."

"But I thought you were so fond of him?"

There was a choking sensation in Annie's throat as she answered, "There is nobody, and there will never be anybody, I shall care for as I do for him; and that is the reason why . . . ." She stopped, and then exclaimed with vehemence, "Oh, Ita, I did not mean to say this; but remember, if he ever asks you to marry him, if you ever do marry him, you are more bound than any woman ever was to make him happy!"

Annie left the room after this burst of feeling, which threw Ita into a strange agitation, and walked straight to Mrs. Gerald's apartment. As soon as she had shut the door, she said, "I am very sorry for you, Aunt Gerald, because I know it will vex you; but I am not going to marry Edgar, and it is of no use to say anything to me about it."

Mrs. Gerald looked at her quite aghast. "God help us, then," she murmured, and then coldly asked if they had quarrelled.

"No; on the contrary, we are greater friends than ever."

"But then why . . . . ?"

"Well, because, though he has tried not—tried, I believe, as hard as possible—he is in love with Ita, and he must marry her."

"No, you cannot, you do not mean that! It is too bad, too dreadful!"

"No, it is not bad, it is not dreadful. What does it signify, if I don't mind? Why should anybody else mind, if I don't? It is my own doing."

Mrs. Gerald's head sank on her breast. She looked the picture of perplexity and woe. Annie's excitement took the shape of anger at what seemed to her an exaggerated manifestation of sorrow on the occasion: She was determined not to be pitied—that was the only thing she could not bear; and Mrs. Gerald was looking at her with a commiseration which irritated her beyond measure.

"Good gracious! Aunt Gerald," she exclaimed, "do not be in such despair. I shall never marry, and Holmwood will still belong to the *Derwents!*" Mrs. Gerald seized Annie's hands, and said with a tremulous energy, "Oh, Annie, Annie, my poor unhappy child, what have you done! You have marred your whole destiny."

"No; and I should not much care if I had. I don't think it signifies so much about being happy. I suppose . . . ." here her voice faltered a little, "I suppose you will not go abroad *now*, Aunt Gerald?"

Mrs. Gerald pressed her lips to her cheek without answering. She seemed hardly able to speak or think —all her plans were overthrown, all her reckonings at fault.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

About two years and a half had elapsed since the evening when Mrs. Gerald had said to Annie Derwent, "You have marred your own destiny"—since Ita Flower had suddenly passed from the deepest dejection to the most lively anticipations of happiness—and Edgar Derwent found himself tacitly engaged to the portionless girl whom he passionately loved instead of to the rich heiress who, to use her own words, once uttered half in jest, but perhaps with a secret sadness at heart, had let him off marrying her.

Certainly, up to the time we are speaking of, Annie seemed to have attained her object, if that object was to secure her cousin's happiness. From the moment that she had given him up as her husband, and he had married Ita, she had applied herself with an affectionate solicitude to provide for and increase, by every means in her power, the comforts and enjoyments of their home. She made this her special work. Whilst he was spending his honeymoon by the sea-side, the little vicarage house became transformed, by dint of care and expense, into a lovely cottage, furnished in the most comfortable manner. She filled it with the pictures he had always admired most at Holmwood, stored the shelves with his

favourite books, and transferred the prettiest flowers from her conservatory to the little greenhouse adjoining Ita's sitting-room.

On the day they were to return, she went to give a last look at everything she had done and arranged. It was on a hot afternoon in July, rather tired with her exertions, she sat down on the lawn to rest, and as her eyes fell on her old friends, poor Mr. Pratt's beehives, the words of his favourite hymn—

> "How doth the little busy bee
> Improve each shining hour"—

came into her mind. She felt a rising in her throat, a wish to cry, she could hardly have said why.

Things affect us in an indirect manner, when we are suffering more than we are quite aware of, or are willing to acknowledge to ourselves. Annie thought her emotion proceeded from the recollection of the dear old man who had been so fond of her, but this was probably not quite the case. The newly-married couple were to arrive at about six o'clock, and she had meant to receive them and enjoy their surprise at the sight of the improvements she had been making. But before the time came she thought better of it.

There were great delicacy and great diffidence in Annie's reserved nature. "No," she said to herself, suddenly rising from the bench under the old horse-chesnut tree—"No, their arrival will be perhaps one of the happiest moments of their lives. Perhaps, if I was here, I should spoil it a little. Edgar might be sorry for me, though he need not. I should have liked to have shown him myself the new bench under the sunset-tree, but it is better not."

She told the housemaid to give her love to Mr. and Mrs. Derwent, and to say that she would pay them a visit after breakfast the next day.

When Mrs. Gerald saw her darling Annie coming home pale and tired, she felt all sorts of fond tumultuous sensations rising in her heart. She would have liked to express them, but it was seldom possible to show Annie sympathy. She did not like it—and less from her aunt than from any one else. She did venture, however, to kiss her forehead, and to her great surprise Annie looked up in her face and said, "You must not think I mind it, Aunt Gerald." Aunt Gerald felt the tears rushing into her eyes, but turned away that they might not be seen.

Certainly, Annie did not look as if she was a person to be pitied on the following day, when she paid her visit to the Vicarage, and listened to Ita's delighted exclamations about the beauty of everything that had been done for them, and ran about with her from room to room, and then from the lawn to the flower-garden, and from the kitchen-garden to the dairy, explaining, showing and enjoying everything together like two pleased children. Edgar was as delighted as she could have wished with the position of the new bench. "Dearest Annie," he said, "we sat there last night and watched the sunset, only wishing you had been with us. It was a beautiful sunset, and everything so still and calm, and the view of Holmwood so lovely through that peep in the trees you have made, that we could not help feeling that you had prepared for us a little ready-made Paradise, too fair for this world."

"Well, you must let me take care of your Paradise for you. I mean to be head gardener at the Vicarage, if you please. I know you will both be quite engrossed with parish work, and all that sort of thing, and you will want somebody to look after the flowers. So will you now promise that you will not mind me any more than the boy who works in the garden, and then I

shall not mind going in and out, and doing jobs about the place. I mean to be your odd woman."

They laughed and said she should do and be everything she liked; and so she did, and the arrangement proved a very agreeable one to both parties. Edgar and his young wife would not have thought it right to spend much time or money on ornamental gardening; but Annie had plenty of means and an abundance of leisure, and while they worked amongst the poor and visited the sick, and taught in the school, she built them a conservatory, made a little fountain, clipped the rose trees, planted annuals, opened views, and spent whole hours by herself working in some part or other of their little domain, inspecting the dairy, feeding the chickens, and making herself, as she often remarked, "generally useful." She felt their happiness was her work, and she enjoyed it. Sometimes as she was twining the creepers round the pillars of the verandah —one of her new additions to the little old-fashioned red brick house—she glanced at the study where Edgar was sitting with his pale, grave, thoughtful countenance bent over his books, and Ita by his side writing under his dictation, and now and then raising her earnest eyes to look in his face, while with her pen in hand she waited for the next sentence he would utter. Or she would see them go out arm-in-arm towards the village, and as they passed the orchard where she was busy pruning, she heard Ita's joyous laugh, and watched her light step—the laugh of the happy, the step of the light-hearted. She saw the way in which he leant upon her when he came home tired, for he often walked further than his strength warranted; and perhaps if ever in that generous heart there was the least approach to a feeling of envy, it was then. She liked to see Ita cheering Edgar like a sunbeam, and brightening his life by her sweet childlike merri-

ment; but when he was ill and his wife was nursing him like a ministering angel, and his eyes were following her about with a dependent and wistful expression, then sometimes, just for an instant, there was a little pain in Annie's heart.

But she quickly knew how to drive it away, and raise her own spirits; at one time by buying a new pony-chaise which she insisted on their using, in order not to let her little grey ponies grow too fat for want of exercise; at another, by getting a new lamp made on purpose to spare the sight, or by sending in surreptitiously a particularly comfortable sofa, which Ita was to pretend was for her own use, but on which she was to persuade her husband to lie down. She surrounded them with all that wealth could supply of comfort, and beauty, and charm, without appearing to do so in a glaring or obtrusive form. There was a pleasure they were hardly conscious of—their minds being occupied with grave duties and hard work—in the flowers, sunshine, and shade, rippling water and smooth grass, which encircled their little home; and their mutual love, engrossing and necessarily selfish, though not unamiably so, was basking as it were in the atmosphere of peace, of brightness, and of loveliness with which Annie surrounded them.

Nor did she neglect to assist Edgar in any of the objects he had at heart. When he expressed a wish to rebuild the school, and found a small hospital for the sick of the parish, to restore the church, and convert some cottages on the estate into almshouses, she enabled him to carry into effect every one of these schemes. He had only to say that he wanted money for any purpose of that kind, and it was instantly placed at his disposal. But she now never said a word about religion to him or to Ita. The internal arrangements of the church were transformed according to his views,

and she made no remark; flowers and candlesticks were placed on the altar, daily service and chanting introduced, and she said nothing. She always went to church on Sundays, but she did not personally adopt any new practices; if any one alluded to these novelties in her presence, she changed the subject.

Mrs. Gerald did not take much notice of them either, her mind was otherwise engrossed. At first, after Annie's engagement to Edgar had been broken off, she had appeared miserable. When, after a while, by Annie's efforts, his marriage with Ita was brought about, she seemed restless and uneasy; sometimes she talked of going to Italy, but this was a sort of feeble intention not likely to be realized. The fact was that, unless she took any one in her confidence and imparted to them the doubts which had passed through her mind, she could scarcely set on foot any inquiries with the least chance of success; and she reasoned with herself that after all it was not her duty to take any such steps. She had in good faith accepted Annie as her niece, no one had ever questioned her being Robert Derwent's child. Why should she stir in the matter?

At a time when Ita was thrown on the world nameless, friendless, and well-nigh portionless, and all the felicities of earth seemed showered on Annie, she had almost resolved to try and discover if the former's extraordinary likeness to her brother's wife was a freak of nature, or whether she was not after all the real Annie. The possibility of it since her last interview with Lady Emily had forced itself on her mind, and it seemed a crime to let her go away like an utter stranger, when all the time perhaps she was Robert's child. She used to look alternately at the two girls—at her own, own Annie, so loved since her earliest years, and then at that other girl with those, to her,

terrible, soft brown eyes, so like those of Robert's wife, and feel as if she should go out of her mind with the doubt. The prosperous one was her darling, her idol —for that other poor friendless child, who was perhaps after all the real Annie, she felt a yearning pity, a strange involuntary attraction. All this seemed reversed at times. All the love of past years fought against the new doubt, and the whole misgiving seemed at moments nothing but a bad dream.

When, however, most unexpectedly Ita Flower became Edgar's wife, Mrs. Gerald's mind was filled with a storm of conflicting feelings. The difficulty became greater than ever of disclosing her doubts, even if she had been almost certain that they were well grounded. After Annie had been supplanted and with the most generous unselfishness had promoted Edgar's marriage with her rival, how could she ever bring herself to endanger her position and prospects. When she saw her employing her fortune in benefiting those who, however innocently, had robbed her of the happiness she had once looked forward to, she could not believe it would be right to take the first step in a course which might end in depriving her of home. She now dreaded any evidence coming to light on that point. She never drew aside the curtain over Mrs. Derwent's picture; she could not bear to look at the infant in her arms. Still, supposing by any chance Ita was that infant, she was happy now. She had found in a husband's devoted love more happiness than possessions or fortune could give. Tired of doubts, weary of weighing possibilities, with no new evidence to assist the mental process, Mrs. Gerald became to a certain degree reconciled to let the subject rest even in her own secret thoughts. She persuaded herself that the best course was to remain passive, and shut up in her own breast the knowledge of facts which

might disturb the peace of two persons, who already stood in a somewhat strange position with respect to each other. This decision calmed her spirits, and she seemed tolerably happy during those first two years of Edgar's marriage.

Edgar worked as hard at Holmwood as he had done at Bramblemoor, and Ita threw herself heart and soul into all his occupations and pursuits. She very soon won all hearts in the parish. The people liked him, but they doated upon her. She saw a great deal of Eliza, who was now married to Mr. Roland, and settled at Bramblemoor. Common objects of interest made it a pleasure to meet. There was always something about which to consult the Rolands, or about which to help them. They were poor, and Ita could show them many a little kindness, which was a comfort to them and a joy to herself. Her only trouble in those early days of her marriage was the weakness of Edgar's sight, which rather increased than diminished. He could with difficulty read and write at night, but she was his eyes and his hands, he used to say.

"And your heart, too, Edgar!" she would add, with her bright smile, "your sweetheart, as the old books say. I do not like those pretty words to be used in the way they now are. Nancy Betts told me yesterday that Tom Pike was her *sweetheart!* Fancy Tom being any one's sweetheart! I could as soon fancy Polly's being his lady love."

"Why, what is your idea of a lady love?" Edgar asked.

She smiled and answered, "A lady loved, I suppose, in a chivalrous manner. With something of worship, in the old sense of the word, mixed up with love. I think old Mr. Sydney's manner to his wife gives one the idea of that sort of feeling, and her way of enjoying his care and tenderness is so pretty. I think they are such nice people!"

A cloud passed over Edgar's face. The Sydneys were rather a sore subject to him, and the only approach to a quarrel between him and Ita had been about accepting or not an invitation to Grantley Manor. Ita was very confident that there could not be the least objection now to her talking about religion with Mrs. Sydney. What she had said to her at Carsdale before her marriage had indeed made some impression upon her at the time, because then she had no idea how Catholic the Church of England was. Now she was so satisfied and so happy that it could not be bad for her to see Roman Catholics, and Mrs. Sydney had always been very kind to her; she would be sorry not to keep up the acquaintance.

"I have no objection, dearest love, to your doing so," Edgar would reply; "but I particularly hope you will not form an intimate friendship with a person who has abandoned the Church of her baptism."

Ita looked thoughtful. "Is it a duty, Edgar, for people to remain in the Church in which they have been baptized?"

"A very great duty. We owe allegiance to our Spiritual Mother."

"But, Edgar, I believe *I* was baptized by a Roman Catholic priest."

"Conditionally, I suppose; they could not have known whether you had been baptized or not."

"Ah, well; I suppose it was conditionally, as you say; but *if* I had not been baptized before?"

"Yours is an exceptional case; we cannot argue upon it."

"I mean that I owe no more allegiance to one Church than the other."

"If not on that ground, on a thousand others."

"Edgar, did not the Donatists, whom you were writing about last night, baptize people?"

"Yes."

"But then was it not right for them to leave the Church of their baptism?"

"The Donatists were heretics—the Anglican Church holds all true Catholic doctrine. So the cases are not similar."

"But then it seems to me that it is of no use speaking about the Church of our baptism; that the question is whether the Church in which we were baptized is heretical or not?"

"Of course that is the question; and, as the Church of England is not heretical, any one who has been baptized in that Church has no right to leave it."

"Is the Church of Rome heretical?"

"No; she is full of abuses, but has not fallen into explicit heresy."

"Then if I could ever find out that *that* baptism was my real baptism, I should be obliged to be a Roman Catholic?"

"You never *can* find it out. Besides, there are circumstances which make it a moral obligation for you to belong to the English branch of the Church Catholic."

"I do not want to leave it," Ita said, tenderly pressing her cheek against her husband's shoulder; "you know how I love Ruth's words, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' There is no fear of my wishing to be what you are not."

As she took up her pen again, the thought passed through her mind, "But who is it who settles what is heresy and what is not?" She would not, however, begin again to argue. She thought she should submit that question to Eliza the next time they met. She liked talking of these things to her and to Mr. Roland better than to her husband. Edgar had a peremptory though not unkind way of answering her questions; or

else he kissed her, or he laughed at what she said; and, if she was gaining the least advantage in the argument, he looked so annoyed that she generally avoided any discussions with him.

In the autumn of the third year of their marriage, Edgar caught a bad cold which left behind it a cough and much languor. His eyes in consequence became still weaker, and the doctors recommended very strongly that he should spend the winter months in the South. He resisted this suggestion at first, but his wife, Annie, Mrs. Gerald, and the Rolands, all pressed him to submit to the verdict, and finally it was settled that he and Ita should proceed to Mentone, and spend four or five months at the villa, which Lady Emily Hendon had taken there for a number of years. The remainder of the lease had been left to Ita, and her delight was unbounded at the idea of going to Mentone and revisiting the home of her childhood. Nor was she insensible to the pleasure of taking Edgar to a house for the time being her own. There was a little touch of self-complacency about this feeling—it was almost like becoming an heiress too in her way. She loved Annie with all her heart for her great kindness to them, but had perhaps experienced a slight vague regret that all her husband's material comforts were derived from his cousin's generosity. At any rate she was delighted that they were now going to live for a while in *her* villa. Edgar was amused at the consequential, childlike manner in which his little wife talked of *her* lemon-trees and *her* olive yard. She laughed herself at the thought of the fuss which the old gardener and his wife would make with the *padrona*.

Edgar had been to Italy before his marriage, but he had entered it by the Mont Cenis and returned by the St. Gothard. He had, therefore, never travelled along that wonderful coast which lines the Mediterra-

nean with a fringe of matchless beauty—with purple mountains, and green hills, and sunny shores washed by the waves of a lake-like sea ; with valleys receding amidst snow-topped heights, fair little towns lying on the edge of the blue waters or crowning the summits of lone rocks ; old cities of the middle ages, grim with feudal towers and ruins, but gilded with sunshine ; and brightened by orange-trees rising amongst their decaying walls, and encompassing with golden fruitage the fallen grandeur of their palaces, each in smiling majesty adding its peculiar prestige to the surrounding magnificence of earth, sea, and sky.

There is not, perhaps, a greater pleasure on earth than to travel with those we love through scenes new to them, but endeared to us not only by their intrinsic beauty, but also by the poetry of our early recollections. Ita enjoyed to the utmost this delight on the bright sunny December day, when, having left the winter behind them half-way down the Rhone, and slept one night at Nice, she and Edgar crossed the pass which separates its vale of fruitful gardens from the heights above Villa Franca and St. Hospice. Side by side, in a little open carriage, they went on their way, skirting the cliffs on the Corniche road. She was too excited, too happy to talk ! she was afraid of Edgar's missing a single feature of the view—a single effect of light and shade—one glimpse of that glorious scenery. A little exclamation did burst from her lips when they came again in sight of the Mediterranean on the side of the mountain, just beyond the wayside inn sacred to the memory of a French marshal in a cocked hat. It was lying below them like a sheet of molten silver, glittering with that peculiar light which only belongs to southern seas.

"There it is again !" she said ; and he answered, "Yes, and more beautiful than ever."

As they advanced, and passed La Turbia and its Roman tower, which in that bleak spot has weathered the storms of thousands of years, her heart was beating in hushed expectation of what Edgar would say on beholding Monaco and its two promontories, encircling with their smiling banks the little crystal bay and its clear waves. He did say, "How beautiful!" and pressed her hand. She felt then quite happy, and sat anticipating every turn of the road, watching his face, and enjoying his admiration. She was so proud of the blue sea, of the glens and the torrents, of the pines and ilexes, of the grand old gnarled twisted olive-trees, even of the wild heart's-eases by the roadside. Edgar told her that she exulted as vain-gloriously in the beauty of the mountains and the deep colour of the sky, as if she had had a share in their creation.

She coloured, smiled, and said, "No; but I am very glad God made them, and that you admire them." Her heart was full. She did not like him to joke at that moment. He seemed to feel it, and answered in a different tone, "I cannot help thinking, when one sees such magnificent scenery as this, of what St. Augustine says, 'If the prison-house is so beautiful, what will the palace be?'"

"Oh! I only hope," she exclaimed, "that the prison-house is not too beautiful. To see all this again with you is almost too much joy for earth!"

At that moment, about half way down the winding descent, she cried, "There is Mentone;" and the little gem of the Riviera, with its jutting fort, its graceful Campo Santo on the hill, and its picturesque white churches, appeared for an instant on the edge of the waves, but soon to be hidden again by the hills above Capo Martino.

Edgar turned to his wife, and said, "*Your* Mentone!"

She smiled, and answered, "*My* Mentone; but yon-

der is my cradle, the only birth-place I know of, that grand wide sea on which I floated so near death, so strangely helpless, so strangely saved!" She laid her head on her husband's shoulder, and added, "Is it not a singular thing to live, and not to know who gave you birth, whence you came, or anything about yourself, except just your own self. It is rather sad."

"I like it," Edgar said, pressing her hand. "I like to feel that you have no tie, no relatives on earth; that you came straight out of that fair sea; that you belong to nobody but God and me."

"God and him!" Ita repeated to herself the words, "God first, and then him." It was one of those thoughts that at the moment is not much dwelt on, but which seems to sink into the mind and to grow in it.

"Look at that mass of olive woods," Edgar said, "how glorious they are, how unlike the poor stunted olive-trees of Provence—these are real forest-trees; and then those glimpses of the sea between the branches are so lovely. How mild the air is now! What good this climate will do me!"

"I am sure, I am sure it will," Ita joyfully exclaimed.

And now they issued from the shade of the grove which lies at the entrance of Mentone, and entered the beautiful alley of oleanders, leading to the town; on their right the shore of the western bay, with its rippling waves and foaming crests; and on the left a perfect forest of orange and lemon-trees, backed by purple mountains rising one above the other in soft and lovely grandeur.

One hill lower than the rest, and clad in green, drew from Ita the exclamation, "Oh, there is the Annunziata! a chapel which once was a convent. It was one of my favourite walks."

They drove past the inn, the only one then in

Mentone, which now boasts of more than a dozen hotels, and on to the other side of the little town and along its eastern bay, till they arrived at Lady Emily Hendon's villa, one of the first which had been built for foreigners. It stood, surrounded by olive woods, in the midst of a garden full of catalpa-trees and roses, which, even in that wintry season, were blossoming in a wilderness of shrubs and flowers. An orange grove stood behind the house, and in front of it a terrace overlooking the sea; but between it and the shore ran the highroad, bordered on each side by oleanders and cactuses.

That scarcely cultivated garden, rich in the natural magnificence of its fruits and flowers, with the picturesque view of Mentone on one side, and the coast as far as Bordighiera on the other, was as lovely a spot as the imagination can conceive. Edgar was as enchanted as his wife could have desired. They stood on the terrace looking about them till it was dark, and then they could hardly tear themselves away from it, or sit in the house after their dinner, which Antonia had cooked for them, with salutary reminiscences of the sort of plain dishes Lady Emily used to like.

Poor Lady Emily! Ita shed a few tears when she arrived at the villa; and she went and sat a little while in her bed-room, feeling sad. But when she looked out of the window, and saw her husband walking up and down under the ilex-trees, and his eyes met hers with a glad and bright expression, a rush of joy filled her heart. Gratitude for love is so different to gratitude for benefits. Lady Emily was forgotten, and, starting up, she rushed down to join Edgar, and to watch with him the sun disappearing behind the fort, and crimsoning, with a fiery light, the waves, the opposite coast, and the white houses of the promontory of Bordighiera.

An hour or two afterwards they were sitting at the window looking at the stars, when suddenly Edgar exclaimed, "Good Heaven! Is the town on fire?"

Ita glanced in the direction he was pointing to, and said, "Oh no! I remember it is to-day the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and that is the bonfire on the Piazza San Michele."

The flames rose high, and by their light the façade of the church could be seen. She could almost distinguish the statue of the Archangel, which she used to look at with awe in her childish days, wondering if he would ever draw his half-unsheathed sword. She had asked her nurse if he would ever do so. "Not till the day of Judgment," Madalena had answered, and so Ita grew up in the belief that that very angel and sword would enact a part in the world's closing scene.

She was smiling to herself at this reminiscence of her childhood, when Edgar said, "Did you ever see anything like the picturesque effect of the blaze on the old buildings? How pretty the Piazza must be, crowded with people. Come, put on your bonnet, darling, and let us go and see what we can."

She was ready in a minute, and they walked through the olive groves to the ancient gateway at the entrance of the Via Lunga, and down its narrow length to the foot of the fine broad flight of stairs which leads up to the Piazza San Michele. It was densely crowded, but room was made for the strangers. As the bonfire was going out, they followed up the steps, through the narrow archway, the crowd of peasants who were hurrying into the Church of the White Penitents, where the *festa* was kept. Ita felt as if she was dreaming. To be going with Edgar into a Catholic church made her heart beat with a strange joy.

It is often thrown in the teeth of converts to Catholicism that they always had a leaning to the

Church of Rome, that they were always known to have an attraction towards her. Well—let it be granted that the conversion of those who had a repugnance to her forms, who saw no charm in her services, no beauty in her worship, but who yielded to the force of irresistible conviction, is a greater proof of her claims to the submission of dispassionate minds—is it any proof against those claims that they approved themselves instinctively to other minds and hearts? If a mother had lost her child, would it be a proof that that child was not hers, if before legal proofs of it were laid before him, he had felt his heart yearn towards that mother? If we have been baptized into the Church of Christ, by whatever hands, or in whatever place, is it strange that we should feel our relationship to that Church? That long before conviction, even perhaps before doubts had taken possession of our souls, we should have heard the voice of God speaking to us in faint, low whispers, whenever we approached her altars, and bowed down before the Blessed Sacrament?

If Ita was ever to be a Catholic, her conversion had certainly no chance of being considered as a triumph over dislike and prejudice. From her earliest childhood the word Catholic, the sight of a crucifix, or a picture of the Madonna, a procession passing along the streets greeted by the bowing down of reverent heads, and lowly-bended knees, made her heart beat, and her eyes fill with tears; and she had felt, long before she believed in the Real Presence, or understood the meaning of the word, that Benediction was a blessing. When, after nearly three years' interval, she found herself with Edgar in the presence of the brilliantly lighted altar, where the priest was about to give that mysterious blessing, it would be difficult to describe her emotion. She was anxious to see if he

would kneel. When he did so, and with his face buried in his hands, she rejoiced far too much, perhaps; for this act of worship did not imply what it formerly did, when the recognition of the reality of the divine gift in the Sacrament of the Altar was the harbinger of conversion to the Catholic Church. In Edgar's case it was the necessary result of a theory he was obliged to carry out—the necessary admission that the Church of Rome possessed what his sect in the Anglican Establishment likewise claimed.

Let it not be understood that Ita was at that time positively desiring her husband's conversion to the Catholic Church. Far from it. Had Edgar told her *then* that he had made up his mind to be a Roman Catholic, she would have heard the announcement with mixed feelings. She had entered with ardour into all he had begun to do at Holmwood; and to Romanize the Church of England, and see it reconciled to the Church of Rome, was the day dream of her life. She had rather vague ideas as to when and how this was to happen. In the meantime, her code was to love everything Catholic—to indulge in all possible Catholic devotions—to sympathize with everything Catholics thought and did—and, as long as she was permitted to do all this, to be a good Anglican. But she could not endure attacks or reflections on the Church of Rome. Then came out the instinctive feelings of the child. Edgar had tried her in this way already, two or three times, since they had been abroad. On these occasions she felt all sorts of rebellious thoughts against the Church of England rising in her mind, and could not always help expressing them, or showing that she only based her allegiance to it on the presumed fact of its union, at least in spirit, with the Roman Catholic Church. One day, when they had passed a picture in a wayside shrine, representing the holy souls

in Purgatory begging for prayers, he had quoted the lines in the "Christian Year":—

"If thou hast loved in hours of gloom
To dream the dead are near,
And people all the lonely room
With guardian spirits dear,—

"Dream on the soothing dream at will,
The lurid mist is o'er,
That showed the righteous suffering still
Upon th' eternal shore."

She had observed—"I do not see how the departed souls would be the worse for our prayers if they did not need them; whereas, if they wanted that help, and we went on 'dreaming on that soothing dream,' it would be very terrible for them and for us."

"The question is," Edgar replied, "whether that belief is the true one or not."

"Oh! yes—of course—but I have rather given up thinking about that."

"What do you mean, my love?" Edgar exclaimed.

"What I mean is this—if the Church of England is a real Church, and the Church of Rome a real Church too, then it almost would seem as if there was no such thing as truth."

"How can you speak so, Ita?"

"I mean no such thing as truth that we can be certain about. If a person is obliged to believe in France what the Church teaches him, and in England what the Church teaches him, they cannot both believe the truth. You always speak of Mr. Keble as if he was such a good Churchman, and yet he says things in those beautiful poems of his which go right against what Catholics abroad are taught to believe—in those lines you repeated just now, and those others about the Blessed Sacrament:—

"'Oh! come to our Communion Feast!
There present in the heart,
Not in the hands, th'Eternal Priest,
Will his true self impart.'"

"We do not take for granted what any individual says, however wise or good he may be; but, as regards the present question, the modern ideas about Purgatory are one of the additions the Church of Rome has made to its faith."

"But, Edgar, if I was a Frenchwoman, if I was living at Paris or Marseilles, I should be obliged to believe in Purgatory. The Church would then be teaching me an untruth."

"You would not be responsible for any error which you had not the means of discovering. God would not call you to account for the result of the position in which His Providence had placed you."

"But if, either by reading or speaking with an Anglo-Catholic, I was to find out that some of the things the Roman Catholic Church teaches are corrupt additions to the old faith, what should I be obliged to do? Ought I, in that case, to leave the Catholic Church in my country, or to pretend to believe what I did not, or try to believe what might not be true?"

"I do not see, my dearest love, why you should trouble yourself to think how you ought to act in a position in which you will never be placed. You belong to a pure Church, which has retained all the essential and true Catholic doctrines and rejected Roman additions. Therefore no such difficulty exists for you, and it is a waste of time to be discussing how others ought to act and feel under different circumstances."

Ita sighed. It is so painful to get answers which do not meet the want pressing sorely on your soul, which turn instead of confronting the difficulty in your

mind. "But if I was to have a thought—you would call it a temptation I know—that the Church of England taught something that was not true, I should be obliged to drive it away. It says, for instance, that the Roman Church has erred . . . ."

"I have explained to you, my love, in what sense that article is understood by many members of our Church. They maintain that it only means that if the Churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred in matters of faith, so has the Church of Rome. For my part, I conceive that the Church of Rome has erred in many respects, though not so as to forfeit its position as a teacher of truth to its children."

"Then you think it teaches them a great deal of truth and a little falsehood?" Edgar made no answer and she went on. "And that is why I said just now, that I do not think much of what is true or what is false. It seems to me more a matter of obedience than of faith. It seems to be the duty of one person to believe in one way, if he is born at Calais; and another in another way, if he is born at Dover. On one side of the sea a good Catholic must think the Church of England is a branch of Christ's Church, and on the other side a good Catholic must think she is no such thing. And so about many other things too . . . ."

"The humble pious Catholic at Calais, who fulfils all the duties his Church prescribes, and does not trouble his mind to determine difficult abstract points, will not be called to account for the mistakes which his humility and docility may lead him into. We may be sure of that, my love, and I only wish there was amongst us more of that submissive spirit which exists in the Church of Rome."

Ita was going to exclaim, "Oh, but it is so dif-

ferent!" but she felt it was better not to press the argument further. She shut up again in her heart that inexorable problem against which all Anglican arguments break their points—"the absence of authority in the so-called English Church," and avoided for some days all subjects of conversation with her husband which would have led to discussions of this sort. But it was a great pleasure to her to find that he was willing to pray in Catholic churches as well as to look into them.

On the evening we were speaking of, the music in the Church of the Conception was better than is usually the case at Mentone. The Confraternity of the White Penitents, to whom it belongs, had done their best on that occasion; and, though Edgar thought it too noisy and lively, neither his ears nor his prejudices were greatly shocked. The inside of the church was, however, very hot, and when they hurried out there was a cold breeze blowing from the sea. Edgar had not brought a greatcoat, and Ita was frightened at feeling how cold it had turned. The sunny warmth of a December day had deceived them both. She took off her own shawl, and wanted to insist on wrapping it round his chest and throat.

He said, "Nonsense, darling. Put it on yourself. I insist upon it."

"You make me miserable, Edgar," she said, half crying. "It is dreadfully cold. You will be ill. Now, dearest, do, do."

"Certainly not, my love."

"But, Edgar, you know, it does not signify if I catch cold, and very much if you do."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Come along, we can walk fast."

Ita had been speaking quite aloud in her distress, and was heard by a gentleman who was also coming

out of the church. He stepped forward and said, "Will you excuse me, but I know what it is to be taken in by these southern climates at this time of the year. I have a cloak with me which I do not want, for I lodge close by here; may I lend it you?"

Edgar began to thank the stranger and to refuse; but Ita eagerly took hold of the proffered cloak and wrapped it round her struggling husband.

"I am so much obliged to you," she said to the owner. "It is so very kind."

"Where shall we send it back?" Edgar asked, feeling rather cross with his wife. "I am really quite ashamed . . . ."

"To No. 9, Via dei Cappuccini," answered the stranger. "Any time to-morrow will do. Here is my card."

"Now really, my love, you are too tiresome . . . ."

"No, dear old man, you are too foolish." And so they went home disputing.

When they got home, and looked at the card Edgar had put in his pocket, he read the name of the Reverend Edmund Neville.

"The Reverend Edmund Neville," he said, looking inquiringly at Ita.

She took the card and exclaimed, "I will tell you who he must be. It must be Mrs. Sydney's brother-in-law."

"The priest?"

"Yes, the widower, who became a priest. I heard he was in bad health. I suppose he is spending the winter here."

Edgar said nothing.

CHAPTER II.

After breakfast on the following morning, Edgar said he should carry back the cloak to Mr. Neville's lodgings, and leave his card if he did not find him at home. "I suppose you will not take a walk so early," he said to his wife, who was standing at the door in ecstasies over some pink geraniums on the wall of their villa.

"I should like very much to go out with you," she answered, "but I think I had better devote this morning to the painful business of looking over the papers in poor Lady Emily's bureau. I have got the keys, you know."

She hesitated a little and then added, "Mrs. Gerald advised me particularly to look for a paper . . . . about myself, which she said Lady Emily had told her must be here. It was drawn up at the time she adopted me."

"By all means look for it," Edgar answered, "but I do not expect that you will learn anything more from it than you have heard from Mr. Hendon."

He shaded his eyes with his hand and said, "How overpowering the light is! Whether this climate does me good or not in other ways, I am afraid my sight will suffer from it."

"Only just at first," Ita exclaimed, going up to him. "You know the doctors say that it is general weakness which affects your eyes, and as you grow strong here, they will also get well."

He smiled and kissed her wistful, though bright face. "I have always told you that some day you will have to be my eyes, love. I could still perform my duties with you to write for me and help me."

"It will not come to that," she replied, shaking her head.

"It may, or it may not," he said. "But it is better to be prepared for it."

He went out, and the dazzling view with all its sunny, glittering beauty did not, at that moment, seem as fair to Ita as it had done just before.

She went slowly upstairs to what had been Lady Emily's bed-room. It was a strange thing, she thought, to open that bureau where she used to see her writing her letters, and settling her accounts, which she did not venture even to approach in former days; and now, with the full freedom and uncontrolled power death gives to survivors, she was about to turn over and investigate its contents. One drawer after another she opened and examined. They contained letters from friends and acquaintances, account-books, receipts, a few drawings, one or two little albums and boxes, advertisements and prospectuses. Nothing of value or of interest.

At last, under the programme of a concert at Nice, and an extract from an old "Times" newspaper, she found an Italian document written in a stiff, legal hand. She soon perceived it was the paper Mrs. Gerald had spoken of. It was drawn up by a notary, and gave an account of the manner in which she had been picked up at sea in her infancy by the fisherman Giovanni Piombo. He stated that the *bambina* was lying wrapped up in a red shawl at the bottom of an empty boat, which was drifting at the mercy of the waves, between the coast of the Riviera and Corsica, that he had got hold of the boat and taken the

creatura, whom he found was alive, on board his vessel, and carried her with him to Ajaccio, where some time afterwards he brought her back to his home at Spedaletti, a village on the sea shore between Bordighiera and San Remo. His wife and himself, though *povera gente*, had taken care, for three years, of the child, and had her baptized conditionally at their parish church. The certificate of this baptism was in the same cover with Giovanni's statement. Then followed in accordance with the laws of the country, the conditions of Lady Emily Hendon's adoption of the child. It touched Ita to see that the fisherman had stipulated that she was to be brought up a *buona Christiana*. In his simple faith he did not imagine that any one could attach a different sense than he did to those words.

Ita leant her head on her hands and tried to recall as much as she could of those early days of her life. She remembered sitting on Giovanni's knees while he was mending his nets on the shore, and his wife feeding her with *pollenta*. She had also a distinct recollection of the day when she was taken away from their cottage, and the carriage in which she was carried to Mentone. They used, those good people, to see her now and then at the villa, till she was about nine years old. Then the fisherman died, and Genoveva soon afterwards. She had heard Maddalena, the woman who took care of her, say that she had got a Mass said for one of her friends who was dead, and so the next time she saw the Abbé Giovanni, she asked him if he would say one for Piombo and his wife. He promised he would, and giving her his blessing, said that God would reward her some day for this little act of charity. She now would see the Abbé and explain to him that her husband and herself were Catholics—Anglo-Catholics—and not at all like Mr. Nilson and

Mrs. Greatwell, and some other English people, who wanted to make the Mentonese Protestants.

Maddalena, her old nurse, had always looked on the English clergyman, who lived in a villa near Lady Emily's, as an agent of the devil; for he had told her it was wrong to pray to the Madonna, and to kneel down before the Blessed Sacrament. Ita had caught something of her nurse's feeling on the subject; so that when at the age of seven she was taken for the first time to Mr. Nilson's house to spend an hour in his dining-room while he read through the Anglican Service, and then a sermon, and that, too, on a day when Maddalena had promised she should go to San Michele, and kiss the feet of the divino Bambino, who was to be carried round the church for everybody to see Him and to embrace Him, she felt no reverent or amicable feelings towards the minister or the service.

With flushed cheeks and pouting lips, and some unflattering Mentonese expressions of contempt and aversion passing through her mind, she went through the compulsory ordinance; and ever afterwards, throughout her childhood and early youth, it became her object to escape the Anglican Service, and slip away with Maddalena to Mass or Benediction. As Lady Emily did not go to church herself, and really cared very little if Ita went or not to Mr. Nilson's dining-room, her efforts were often attended with success. It was only when, now and then, English friends were staying with them that she had to go as a matter of course to the "Messe des Anglais," as Lady Emily's courier called the Protestant Service.

All this came back very vividly to her mind, and she thought what a different religion it was she had learned from Edgar. She compared the hated dining-room with the churches of Holmwood and Bramble-

moor, and the things she remembered hearing from Mr. Nilson with those Edgar and Mr. Roland taught, and painfully tried to recall the theory which accounted for these strange discrepancies between the teachings of those who were all clergymen of the Church of England. She tried to make it clear to her own mind; for it struck her how difficult it would be to make the Abbé Giovanni and her dear friend in the Via Lunga, la Signora Santa Agnese, understand it.

The sound of steps under the windows roused her from these absorbing thoughts, and an instant afterwards she heard Edgar's voice calling her. She hastily locked up the bureau, ran downstairs, and found, with her husband in the drawing-room, a pale, thin, middle-aged man, whom she recognized at once.

"Mr. Neville," Edgar said, when she came in. "Mrs. Sydney's brother-in-law." She expressed warmly her gratitude about the cloak, and he said, with a smile—

"It was not on the strength of the cloak I ventured to call, but Margaret Sydney told me I might use her name as an introduction."

"Oh yes, of course," Ita exclaimed. "We are so glad to make your acquaintance." She glanced a little anxiously towards her husband, but he did not look displeased or embarrassed, and the visit passed off very well. He even asked Mr. Neville to stay for luncheon, but he said that was too English a meal for him. He breakfasted at twelve, according to the custom of the country.

When he had gone away, Ita said, "How pleasing Mr. Neville is!"

"He looks like a person who has gone through much suffering," Edgar remarked.

"I am so glad you asked him to come and see us again. I was so afraid you would not."

"Why did you think so?"

"Because he became a Roman Catholic—you have such a strong feeling on that subject."

"His case I consider rather an exceptional one. There is much that accounts for the step he has taken. You know he concealed his marriage for some time from motives of interest, and made his wife very unhappy. He wanted to constrain her to abandon the Church in which she had been baptized and educated. His remorse afterwards was very great, and she acquired so much influence over him that it was not wonderful that he ended by embracing her religion. This was more than fifteen years ago, I think, at a time when the principles and claims of our Church were far less understood than now, and I look upon his change very differently than on recent acts of that sort, when men who had owned and served the Church of England as their spiritual mother, have forsaken her and gone over to a hostile camp, not out of ignorance, but from restlessness and impatience."

Perhaps some other day Ita would have been inclined to defend the seceders to Romanism, for whom she felt a secret kindness. She looked upon them as an advanced guard gone on before, whither she hoped eventually to see all those she cared for arrive by means of corporate re-union—a thing often spoken of by Edgar and the Rolands to allay her longing for unity whenever it became at all troublesome; only it threw her rather into despair when they said, "It would not be then, or for twenty, or for fifty years, perhaps; but that, nevertheless, they were on the way to it."

"But by the time it happens we shall all be dead," she used to urge, and then they said—

"What did that signify? They were sowing, and others would reap."

"But why wait, and die waiting, when we might have now what we are waiting for?"

Then she was gently taxed with impatience; reminded of the beautiful words: "In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength," and advised not to make haste in time of clouds.

These exhortations acted like opiates on her mind, stilling its misgivings without removing them. For a while she acquiesced in the exercise of that unreasoning submission which her husband preached to her. It would have naturally suited her fervent, humble, and gentle spirit, but still the question would rise again, the never-answered, imperious, merciless question, which no sophistry can meet and no ingenuity evade, "Whom am I to trust; to whom and to what am I to submit; whether I look up to heaven above or to the earth beneath, where is the voice which can speak audibly to my conscience, and bid me accept any one of the jarring dictates which in discordant multiplicity and endless contradiction, resound from the heights, and issue from the depths of the so-called Church of England? How choose between opposite dogmas? How reconcile irreconcilable precepts?"

However, with the feminine quickness and tact which she was peculiarly gifted with, Ita felt that it would not be well to take notice of Edgar's happy inconsistency, or on that first day at Mentone to engage in an argument which might excite in him any hostile feelings towards Roman Catholicism, so she abstained from uttering a word in favour of those he called apostates. She was only too glad that he saw extenuating circumstances in the case of Mrs. Sydney's brother-in-law, and could afford to leave undefended the more recent converts.

Many were the loved spots where she was longing

to take Edgar. She felt much more disposed to make him acquainted with her favourite views and walks than to take him to visit her friends. She foresaw a certain difficulty in making some of them understand his position. If she told them he was a Protestant clergyman, besides giving him offence by calling him so, she was afraid they would set him down as no better than Mr. Nilson or M. Bercail, the Swiss minister. But if she said he was a priest, they would be horrified at his being married. She would have made up her mind to describe him simply as an English gentleman, but she had misgivings that he would not submit to this suppression of his sacerdotal character, and would puzzle them by allusions to it. His dress, too, verged on that of a priest, and would attract attention.

So instead of proposing to introduce him to her acquaintances, she asked Edgar on the day but one after their arrival to go with her to the Annunziata, a small chapel on a height above the town, midway between the valley of Turin and that of Cabrol, and below the purple mountains which encircle the white little city, embowered in its groves of golden fruitage. She dearly loved this rustic sanctuary with its evergreens and its pines; its simple images and rude ex-votos. Every turn of the steep ascent was familiar to her; every stone where she had been accustomed to rest; every ruined shrine on the roadside where pilgrims, with their beads in hand, once paused and meditated on the mysteries of the rosary. She loved the clear sky, the glimpses of the sea, the fresh sweet air, the sight of the peasants, of the goats, of the flocks, of the patient donkeys, of the barefooted children; but what most delighted her was Edgar's intense enjoyment, his enthusiastic admiration of the scenery. In that respect their sympathy was perfect. Both had

religious minds, and as they ascended the hill words out of the Psalms seemed to rise naturally to their lips—words of adoration, praise, and love ; words that express the deepest, sweetest, and highest emotions of the soul, just as much now as when they first burst from the burning heart of Israel's inspired king. They sang them together while resting on a green bank half way up the ascent, and when they left off singing, Ita gathered the little flowerets within her reach, and pulled them to pieces in order to dive into the wonderful mysteries of beauty concealed within their secret folds. With childlike ecstasy she saw, with the help of Edgar's magnifying-glass, each little speck on the pistil of the arum, the dark monk's-hood expand into a little blossom of exquisite loveliness.

"How bewildering it is," she exclaimed, "to think of the endless amount of beauty scattered over the face of the world, unknown, unenjoyed by any living being, by men at least. I wonder if the angels enjoy anything on earth, if they see beauty in what seems to us so lovely."

"As our Lord saw beauty in the flowers of the field, why should not angels ? "

"Oh, yes ; then I hope they do. I am so glad that is mentioned in the gospel." Ita was silent a moment, and then said, "How one would wish to live many lives in one ! To have days of boundless length and capabilities to acquire every kind of knowledge ! There are openings on all sides, but they seem to close before we have time to appreciate them."

"I suppose we are given those glimpses," Edgar replied, "to lead us higher than this world."

"But even this world we see so little of. How many people I am sure have never looked into the inside of a monk's-hood," Ita said, once more peeping into the secret folds of the dark little plant.

"And some never think of looking up at the starry sky."

"I do not care near so much about the stars as about the earth. They give me puzzling thoughts, and I hate perplexity."

"You are not patient," Edgar said, laughing. "It is great wisdom to submit to our own inevitable ignorance."

She smiled. "Yes, you are quite right; but I do not like to think of what I cannot understand."

"And yet you are always starting thoughts of that kind—wondering over all sorts of things—just now about the mysterious amount of beauty lavished upon this world, where so few appreciate and enjoy it."

"I was wrong to say that I did not like to think of what I do not understand. It is what perplexes me that I dislike. The two are very different. Perplexity is a distressing feeling, whereas we can admire and adore what we cannot fathom. Indeed, we could hardly adore, I think, what we did quite understand. It would not be enough above us for that."

"But what, then, perplexes you in the stars?"

"Their innumerable number. They fill, and rise, and multiply in the sky, till it gives me a giddy feeling to look at or think of them."

"But, my foolish darling, are not the waves of the sea and the blades of grass on the earth equally countless?"

"True; but we know more about them. I should not mind if I were sure the stars were only what Milman calls them—'God's lamps enthroned on high.' I do not want to think that they are worlds. Sometimes, however, I fancy that they may be the mansions our Lord speaks of, when He says there are many of them in His Father's house. That is one of the passages in the Bible I often muse over, Edgar. I hope we are sure, you and I, of being in the same mansion."

"You take things very literally, love; but *sure* we cannot be, even of going to heaven."

"No; but we hope it with a feeling very like security. As God is our Father, if we really always do what we think pleases Him, we cannot be afraid."

"No; if we do to the utmost of our power what He reqnires of us, we shall be saved."

"And we will—we will both always do what we see to be right." She looked up into her husband's face with an earnest, eager, wistful look. "You will, I know you will not find it difficult—you are so brave and so strong. I shall try. I promise you to try." . . . . A sudden thought passed through her mind at that moment. It came like a shot, and thrilled through her heart with something like physical pain. It was the idea that it might happen one day that she and Edgar would not agree as to what was right. The promise she had just made might demand an unexpected fulfilment. She did not think so. She hoped not. It was but the faintest prevision of a possible misery. But it made her silent for a while. She did not mentally retract that promise, but quickly turned away her thoughts from it, and, as she gathered more arums, said, "These brown little monk's-hoods make me think of the Capuchins. Up to the time of the first French Revolution they had a convent at the Annunziata.[1] I wish they were here again! Should not you like to see them in their picturesque habits,

[1] Since the year 1867, the Sons of St. Francis have returned to their ancient abode. One of the descendants of the family which purchased it at the time of the French Revolution, M. Charles de Monléon, has restored it to the religious banished from Genoa by the impious Italian Government. The peasantry welcomed them with all the fervent love and simple faith which still dwell in their hearts, and, by gratuitous labour, after their own hard day's work, have helped to rebuild the monastery and to enlarge the little chapel.

ascending and descending this hill, working and praying in this beautiful solitude ? "

Edgar smiled, and said, " In the meantime, let us go up to the little chapel."

" And pray that this may happen ? "

Edgar did not answer, and they turned into a narrow path close to the spot where the monastery had once stood.

" We are nearly arrived," Ita said, her heart beating with delight. The last scramble was accomplished, and then they stood on the eminence, and at the door of the chapel. Ita pushed it open, and Edgar followed her into the little sanctuary. He took off his hat, and looked about him, in the hesitating manner which indicates the inward doubt how much or how little respect ought to be paid to a Catholic church by a good Anglican. There was no especial reason even for a Catholic to kneel, for at that time the Blessed Sacrament was not reserved in the little chapel of the Annunziata. But this would not have, perhaps, made any difference. It did not occur to Edgar, nor even always to Ita, to think whether the Real Presence, in which they both in a certain measure or manner believed in, hallowed or not at that moment the place where they were standing. So little do those outside the Church practically realize the truth even of what they profess to hold. She longed very much, however, to kneel down before the crucifix, and to lay at the feet of the Madonna the nosegay of pink heath and large white daisies which she had gathered on her way up the hill. In her careless, uninstructed girlhood, she used to perform these little acts of devotion. She longed to renew them with truer feelings of piety, for she knew more of religion now, and had really begun to try to love and serve God. But as long as Edgar was near her she did not venture to follow the impulse

of her heart. She was never sure what he would think on those occasions, and she was afraid of setting him against entering into Catholic churches, by herself showing what he would consider unreasonable and exaggerated devotion. It was, therefore, a relief to her when he said he would take a walk further up the hill, and asked if she would wait for him in the chapel. She was glad when the door was shut, and she could kneel or stand, or sit, as she felt inclined, and timidly, like in old days, dip her finger into the holy-water stoup, with a vague feeling of awe and a sense of refreshment in her soul, which the cool drops seemed to symbolize.

She mused on all that had happened to her since she had last stood within those rude but hallowed walls, where so many successive generations had uttered prayers and thanksgivings. A fishing-boat or lemon-laden vessel hardly sails from Mentone, but a Mass is said at the Annunziata, to beg a blessing on its course, and another is offered up in gratitude when it returns. *She* had returned to the home of her childhood laden with new blessings. Her life, which had threatened to be so lonely, had been enriched and gladdened by a great deep happiness and a priceless love. For more then two years earth had been heaven to her, and her joys had gone on increasing instead of diminishing. "Oh, my God! I thank Thee! I thank Thee with all my heart!" she murmured, with her head resting against the altar rails. She repeated these words three or four times over, but with an unaccountable feeling of depression.

She was not anxious about Edgar's health, though he was very delicate. It had never occurred to her that there was anything really of consequence the matter with him; and there was not a shadow she could see falling on their future, save one, which as

yet was too faint, too fitful, too unreal, to obscure in the least degree her happiness; and yet she did not feel quite as she used to do at Holmwood. There she had led a charmed existence. There she had worshipped Edgar peacefully—idolized him without a misgiving, for whatever progress she made in the knowledge of God and religion was identified with her enthusiastic devotion to him. Now a change, slight indeed, but just perceptible, had come over the spirit of her dream; old difficulties which had laid dormant for a time, rose again in her mind, and though met by inward answers which she earnestly tried to consider as conclusive, were not as easily disposed of as she expected. This was perhaps the cause of the cloud which had dimmed for a moment the perfect enjoyment of that happy day amidst the scenes of her youth.

But it passed away when Edgar returned and called her, and they sat under the pine-trees eating their luncheon, which one of Elisa Ferrari's famous donkeys had carried up the hill.

"How I wish Annie was here!" she exclaimed.

"I do not think her appreciation of Mentone would at all come up to your expectations," replied Edgar. "I know nobody less likely to enjoy being abroad."

"No. I suppose she would not be happy away from Holmwood. Dear Annie, she is very matter of fact. But I should not want her—that is, I should not expect her to feel the sort of admiration for this country which I feel, and which I should have been disappointed if you had not felt. There are persons from whom one does not look for one kind of sympathy, and I think Annie is one of them. She is affectionate and generous beyond anybody in the world, but she would not understand why my feeling about this place is a very peculiar one, and I should

never try to explain it to her. I wonder what it comes from, the power of feeling not only for others but with them?"

"Do I possess that power?"

A slight blush rose on Ita's cheek; she smiled, and said; "You like others to sympathize with you . . . ."

"And do I not sympathize with them?"

"In some things you do. But I think men differ from women in that respect, and perhaps it is right it should be so. I always liked that idea of Milton's, that man was made for God alone, and woman for God and man; it seems more natural that we should enter into all your important interests than that you should sympathize in all our . . . ."

"Your what?" Edgar asked, smiling.

"I cannot find the right word; trifling they are not. What shall I say? womanly ones."

"I cannot imagine, dearest love, one care, anxiety, pleasure, or wish of yours which I should not sympathize with."

"Oh yes, I know you would, my own darling; you are to me all tenderness and goodness. Like that beautiful line of Campbell's—

'A friend to more than human friendship just.'

But the best way in which you can sympathize with me is by always letting me sympathize with you. By letting me have a share in all your thoughts . . . ."

"And yours? do you keep any from me?"

Ita blushed deeply. "Never, but when I think they would pain you."

"How could your thoughts pain me?"

"I think they would sometimes displease you: yours are so positive, so fixed—mine so uncertain, so wavering . . . . But do you know, Edgar, we ought to be going on. We must not forget in this sunshine

and these green woods that the days are as short as at home. Will you have another date?"

"No, no, make over the basket and everything in it to your donkey boy, and let us be off."

They started, and Ita said she would guide her husband down the steep descent, for that he had not been used like her to those stony pathways cut in the rock. He laughed at her, but in jest put his arm within hers. When they had gone a little way he stumbled. She turned laughingly, and said, "There, now, without me you would have fallen. You are walking with your eyes shut," she added, surprised. "Why do you do that, Edgar?" she said with a gentle but very sad smile.

"I was practising," he answered, "against the time when you will have to lead me about. I have often thought, Ita, what a good wife you will make to a blind man. You will describe everything to me. It will do almost as well as seeing; and I think I might still perform most of my duties, and be of use as a clergyman, with you to help me."

"I cannot bear to hear you speak in this way. I am sure you will not become blind. It is all fancy, dearest, darling Edgar."

"It is not *all* fancy," he answered, shading his eyes with his hand. "It is better to be prepared for what may happen; and I want you not to think it would be so bad. With a wife like you, and the perfect union between us of every thought and feeling, *I* should not think it at all an overwhelming calamity."

It was with a feeling she could scarcely have defined, but that made her breathe an irrepressible though inaudible sigh, that Ita heard her husband speak of their complete union of opinion and feeling. She hardly knew whether to be sorry or glad, that he seemed so unconscious that on one subject there was

not perfect sympathy between them. He had not then noticed since they had been abroad what she had so keenly felt. How this illustrated what they had talked of a moment before! How sensitive she was to what he had not even noticed! Was she less frank, less sincere than her husband? She who was always reproaching herself for being too impulsive, too eager, too quick to feel and express what she felt. No, she had not been wanting in openness, although she had kept to herself many a misgiving, many a doubt, which would have angered and grieved him. Nor had he as utterly failed in perceiving her disposition of mind as his words implied. The real fact was that, though he perfectly saw his wife's strong sympathy with Roman Catholicism, he could not apprehend, realize, or conceive that there could be any real danger of her seriously holding different religious opinions from himself. She was so humble and submissive, and, above all, so ardently attached to him, so full of respect and admiration for his talents, that it seemed simply impossible she should ever take a line of her own on the subject.

And as far as natural reasoning went, he was right. But the mistake many people make on this point seems to proceed from their overlooking the fact that faith is a supernatural principle, that each individual soul receives from God graces and lights which it will have personally to give an account of, and that what belongs to its sphere cannot be governed or judged by the same rules which affect mere matters of opinion. Even these cannot always be given up at the will of those we love and look up to. Humility, however, sometimes inspires doubts which may induce submission. But when once faith exists in a soul, no human consideration can command its surrender. It may indeed die almost unconsciously in the soul at an early stage

of its existence under the pressure of outward influences when not courageously resisted. Sometimes it is killed by a deliberate act extorted by others and committed against the cries of a fully awakened conscience, but it cannot follow the ordinary rules of conduct or submit righteously to the influence of affection or the commands of superiors. Its origin is too sacred and its end too divine for even the holiest of human ties to interfere between the soul and God, and to decide if it shall receive or not the gift of its Creator.

Ita was not yet conscious of possessing this faith, and Edgar was perhaps justified in considering her predilection for the Catholic Church at that time as the result of fancies called forth by old associations and imaginative tastes. He remembered all the delight and interest she had taken in his efforts to carry out Church principles at Holmwood and at Bramblemoor. He had no objection to allow her to expect the eventual union of the two Churches, and he had good reason to hope, if not to feel as certain as he did in his own case, that she would live and die in the Anglican Communion. So many go through the phase of mind she was then experiencing. So many advance even further and draw back. They return to what they and their friends call a calmer, more reasonable, less excited state of mind. God only knows if the germ thus destroyed in their souls was the unhealthy growth of a wayward fancy, or the seed which, if it had fallen not on the roadside or the rock, or among the thorns, but in the good ground of an honest and strong heart, might have brought forth fruits of eternal life.

Ita felt it impossible to say anything in answer to her husband's allusion to the possibility of his going blind. She would not even let him see that it affected her, still less could she at that moment have reminded him that there was not a perfect accordance between

them on every point great and small. She disengaged her arm from his, and said she would not on any account let him walk with his eyes shut. That he was to take care of himself; and she went on before him, skipping from stone to stone, and calling on him to follow as if her heart was as light and her spirits even higher than before he had uttered words, which for more than one reason had damped all the joy she had felt when they began to descend the hill together. Alas! in this world, even in domestic life, how much dissimulation goes on—varying from the worst and the meanest falsehood to the most heroic and generous dissembling, often the highest proof of love that can be given on this earth.

When they reached Mentone and arrived at the end of the Contrada di San Michele, for the names of the streets were not then turned into French, she looked at her watch, and as there was still an hour to spare before dinner-time, she asked Edgar to walk on before her along the shore to the villa, while she called on her old friend the Signora Santa Agnese, commonly called Shia Teresina. Shia is a familiar rendering in Mentonese of the word Madame or Signora, and is only used in conjunction with the Christian name. She thought it would be unkind to delay longer paying her a visit. He did not object, and she ran up the hill and under the gateway into what was not inappropriately called the Via Lunga.

The entrance of the houses in this street is, generally speaking, most unpromising; but those on the side of the sea afford an agreeable surprise to strangers, who, after ascending steep staircases or descending dark ones, often find themselves in sunny, cheerful rooms, with pretty balconies, overlooking the eastern bay, and facing the picturesque hills opposite Mentone, on the side of Ventimiglia and Bordighiera.

Ita knocked at the heavy, clumsy door she knew so well, and, when it was opened by the Signora Santa Agnese's servant, a joyful burst of recognition followed. "La Signorina Inglese!" Callista cried in a shrill voice, and led the way to the inner chamber, where sat the old lady, whose eyes seemed by far the most conspicuous part of her diminutive person. She was curled up in a corner of what our forefathers called an easy-chair, but which we should hardly, perhaps, now consider as such. She only occupied half the space intended for its occupant, and the rest was filled up by her work-box, her Prayer-book, and her cat.

"What, figlia mia!" she exclaimed, for Shia Teresina belonged to the old-fashioned Italian society in Mentone, "is that really you?" and she held out her hands, small as those of a child, to Ita, and made her sit down close to her. "And so you are come back at last, Shia Margarita? And not one bit the uglier for your absence! and as fond, I hope, of Mentone as ever? But is it true, figlia mia, that poor Shia Emilia is dead, and that you are married?"

Ita answered the first of these questions with a sigh and a sign of assent, and then said, "Yes; I have been a wife for more than two years."

"Ah, brava!" cried the old lady. "I am glad to hear it. I do not want my friends to follow my example, though I have never wished to marry myself. And your sposo? Is he with you? What a galantuomo he is to have brought you to see us!"

"He is not very strong, and we are come to try if dear, beautiful Mentone will do him good."

"Of course it will. I dare say you have many fine things in your country, but not such sunshine as ours, I suppose; and it is sunshine that brings people to life again. What is your husband's name, carina?"

"Edgar Derwent," she said, trying hard to give an Italian sound to that very English name.

"Dorante? La Signora Dorante. Very well. And Il Signore Dorante is a good husband, I hope?"

"Oh, the best, the kindest husband in the world!"

"Bravissimo! And are you both good Christians, my child? You used to say that you wished to marry a Catholic, and to be one yourself."

"We are English Catholics; that is, I mean Anglo-Catholics."

"That is right—that is right, figlia mia. There are Catholics of all nations—Italian, French, Spanish, English. It makes no difference, so that they belong to the one true Church. Deo gratias! and so, my little lamb, you have found your way at last into the true fold! Let me give you a kiss, I am so happy! I always thought you would be a Catholic. I think I shall make you a present of the rosary, which the Holy Father Pope Pius the Seventh blessed for my mother the day he passed through Mentone on his way back to Rome."

La Santa Agnese kept fumbling in a bag by her side, which contained her most precious treasures. Meanwhile, Ita felt very uncomfortable. She could not allow her to believe she was a real Catholic, and accept her present under false pretences. The word *real* had instinctively suggested itself, but she hastened mentally to retract it, and began to explain that she was not a *Roman* Catholic. La Signora Santa Agnese looked at her in astonishment.

"Not a Roman Catholic! But, figlia mia, there is only one holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, and if you do not belong to it, you are not a Catholic at all."

"Oh, yes, we are a branch—a branch of the Catholic Church. It is, I know, very difficult to understand;

but we really are Catholics, not Protestants. I could not bear to be a Protestant."

"Do you acknowledge the Pope," La Santa Agnese asked. She had vague ideas of united Greeks, Armenians, and others who do not follow the Roman rite, and yet belong to the Catholic Church. Perhaps it was this sort of thing her little friend meant. But when Ita said "No, they were not under the Pope," then her face fell, and she slipped back the rosary into her box.

"You are laughing at me, figlia mia. Those who do not acknowledge the Pope are not Catholics. White is white, and black is black. It is a pity—a great pity. God knows how sorry I am; but let us hope you will one day see the truth. I shall never leave off praying for it, for I have always been fond of you, and I am sure God never made you with that sweet face and that good heart of yours without intending to have you with Him in Heaven."

Ita had always been afraid of the difficulty she should find in explaining Anglo-Catholicism to her friends at Mentone, and her heart sank within her at perceiving how hopeless it would be to convince her dear old Shia Teresina of the fact that she and Edgar were Catholics. She evaded the subject for the present, and inquired about various acquaintances. Then as the rosy hue on Bordighiera warned her that the sun was setting, she rose to take leave of the little old lady, who before parting with her, held Ita's pretty face for one moment between her two hands, and looking earnestly into her soft brown eyes, said: "Do you still love the blessed Virgin as you used to do, little Shia Margarita?"

"Yes, I do," Ita answered in a low voice.

"Bravo, figlia mia. I am not afraid then. She will see to you."

CHAPTER III.

Ita came home a little vexed, she did not exactly know with whom or with what, but she never visited on her husband the effects of the clouds that obscured the inward sunshine of her soul. It was not in her nature to make others uncomfortable. She carried almost to a morbid extent the dislike to give others pain, and to suppress all outward marks of discomposure had become with her a settled habit. So she talked all the evening as pleasantly, and read aloud, and planned an excursion for the next day with as much animation as if she had not felt all the time out of spirits, and as far as ever was the case with her a little out of temper. Edgar had been tired with the long ascent to the Annunziata, and said, "We will not go quite so far to-morrow. By the way, I met Mr. Neville after I left you. He says he will come here to-morrow at two o'clock, and take a walk with us."

Ita did not feel quite as pleased as she would have done the day before at the thought of this visit. There are wayward changes in the feelings of persons in her state of mind. She had resented Signora Santa Agnese's disbelief of a fact that, at the bottom of her heart, she scarcely had faith in herself, and this irritation that her own doubts had thus received a confirmation, gave her for the moment an almost hostile feeling against Roman Catholicism. She felt wounded, as it were, and ill-used by what she loved. It was evident that Roman Catholics utterly scouted the

theory which Edgar had anxiously instilled into her mind. She had taken it on trust, and was clinging to it with a determination to think as he did, and a secret dread of anything which would shake that determination.

As she laid down to sleep that night, with the noise in her ears of "the ever-sounding and mysterious main," so strangely loud and ever-sounding on that shore, a wish came over her that time might stand still for a while. Life was happy then. Would it always continue so? Her religious principles and feelings had been gradually and steadily advancing to a point from which they could never recede without infidelity—to God, and her conscience. They had arisen simultaneously with her first acquaintance with Edgar. They had grown with the growth of a new love and a new happiness. Now a vague fear sometimes crossed her mind whether this earthly happiness and this unearthly faith, which was gaining every day a stronger hold upon her soul, could continue to keep pace with each other. The strength, the demands of that faith, seemed capable of extending beyond all human considerations, and the thought alarmed her sometimes.

The next morning, however, as is so often the case, the vividness of this impression had passed away. The Signora Santa Agnese was a very pious good person, but of course quite ignorant of everything beyond her immediate sphere. It was not to be wondered at that she ignored all Catholicism outside the Church of Rome. The Abbé Giovanni would very probably take the same view of the subject. He could not know what was going on in England, and would naturally consider as Protestants all those who did not belong to his Church. But it was not impossible that Mr. Neville, though of course he would

think it better for everybody to be Roman Catholics, might take a more liberal view of the subject, and understand the position of the Anglican Church. She hoped that he and Edgar would discuss that point.

The day was beautiful—one of those fair bright December days so common on the shores of the Mediterranean. Edgar was looking well, and as Ita was putting on her things she heard him and Edmund Neville talking and laughing on the terrace under her window. She joined them, and they set out to walk to Capo Martino, going through the Contrado San Michele, now the fashionable Rue St. Michel, and then along the pretty picturesque avenue shaded with planes and bordered with oleanders, now alas! fast dying away. They talked as they went along of England, of Holmwood, Grantley Manor, and Carsdale, of their mutual friends and acquaintances, and the news they had heard of them since they had been abroad. Mr. Neville asked after the Rolands, whom he had met in the autumn at his sister's, and their little girl, Ita's godchild.

"Has Mrs. Gerald been pretty well lately?" he inquired.

"No," Edgar answered. "She is not at all in good health. We tried to persuade her and Annie to join us here, but could not induce them to move. Have you found much benefit from the climate?"

"As much as I ever expected to do," Mr. Neville replied.

"I suppose you overworked yourself in London?"

"People said so, but I believe it would have been just the same if I had done nothing." Then he quickly changed the subject, and began to tell them the names of the mountains which rise precipitously above the orange-gardens and lemon-groves, forming that contrast of grandeur and smilingness which is the peculiar

charm of the scenery about Mentone. Even on that winter day the sun was so hot that they were glad, after passing the little chapel of the Madonna near Carnolès, to turn aside to the left into the olive wood, from which they soon emerged on a picturesque bit of sea coast, full of fragments of rocks and famous for its wild flowers. There on the greensward the first crocuses are always to be found.

Then passing again from sunshine into shade, they strolled through a pine wood to the farthest point of the promontory, where the waves were dashing joyfully and throwing up clouds of spray out of the foaming cavities of the red and grey rocks. From this spot, covered with aromatic plants and odoriferous shrubs, on one side is seen Monaco, and on the other Mentone—miniature Venices: little queens of that bright sea which sometimes looks on a calm day like a vast sheet of ice, with shining pathways intersecting its smooth surface, and leading to distant regions of unexplored beauty.

Ita well remembered the wonderful view from this point. She had been looking forward to Edgar's enjoyment of it, but he kept his eyes fixed on the turf, and she saw they could not bear the dazzling glitter of the sea.

"My husband's eyes are very weak just now," she said to Mr. Neville.

"Let us go back into the shade," he answered; "the glare is intense just here."

They found pleasant seats on the trunks of some fallen trees, with glimpses of the view through green branches, which Edgar could enjoy.

A little goat-herd was watching his flock close to them. Ita gave him some sous, and spoke to him in Mentonese. This led to Edgar's saying, "Are the people here as good as my wife declares them to be?"

"Mrs. Derwent, I think, must know more of them than I do," Mr. Neville replied; "but what I have seen since I have been here inclines me quite to agree with her. They seem a good, honest race of people; moral in their conduct, and very pious."

"There, Edgar, you see Mr. Neville is quite of my opinion. I am so glad. You would not believe me."

"You are so enthusiastic about Mentone that I suspect you of seeing everything in too favourable a light. The church was very full that night we arrived," Edgar continued, turning to Mr. Neville. "Are the services always so well attended?"

"Yes, I think so. The novena before Christmas will soon begin, and San Michele will be crowded every evening."

"I wish we could go sometimes," Ita said, "but Edgar must not be out late at night."

"I suppose," Edgar said, "that there is much in foreign churches which must scandalize English Roman Catholics."

Ita felt her cheeks flushing, and eagerly looked at Mr. Neville.

"Some of the habits of the people I might perhaps wish to be different," he said, "but on the whole I think there is much more to be admired than shocked at in the aspect of churches abroad."

"It strikes me that the services are carried on in a slovenly manner; prayers gabbled over, and the men and boys who serve at Mass are sometimes so ill-dressed and dirty. The children behave dreadfully too."

"To those who are used to the slow, declamatory manner in which the Anglican Service is read, there seems, I know, something irreverent in repeating prayers in a rapid manner. But I have found by experience that there can be quite as much, and sometimes more devotion in that way of saying them than

in the other. I suppose a good deal depends on what we are used to. As to the ragged appearance of the servers at Mass, I own I find no fault with it. On the contrary, I like to see that act of devotion performed by very poor people who have not means to get good clothes, or time to make themselves tidy. As to the children, what can we say for them, Mrs. Derwent? They *are* very troublesome."

"But some of them are so good. I have often seen quite little things come into church by themselves, and say a prayer before the altar, and sometimes making the way of the cross without anyone telling them to do it. They do not think it wrong to run up and down the church or smile at each other, as English children would."

"But they ought to think so," Edgar said, "especially in a Catholic church it seems so strange that irreverence should be tolerated."

"But it is not meant as irreverence, and I do not think it can be called so," Mr. Neville answered. "When our Lord was on earth He would surely have suffered little children to run about and smile in His presence?"

Edgar shook his head and would not admit the parallel. "My wife," he said, "thinks everything perfect here. I must never venture on a criticism. She says immediately it is English prejudice. Are you thinking of going on to Rome, Mr. Neville?"

"No, I must return to London as soon as I can. A very different place from Rome."

"But quite as interesting in another way," Edgar said. "I am not one of those who wish they had lived in other times than our own. I am very glad my lot has been cast in the nineteenth century, and, at this period of it. I suppose that, though on many points we disagree, we both must feel the greatest interest in the revival of Catholicism in England."

"Of course I do. Who could have believed half a century ago what we now see? There is a little book called 'Father Clement,' which was written, I think, between forty and fifty years ago, in which this passage occurs; I quote from memory: 'The Roman Catholic traveller would sigh as he remembered that in Britain his Church is almost forgotten; her places of worship in ruins, or, stripped of the character they once bore, now dedicated to another faith; her services regarded as unmeaning ceremonies. Her doctrines held as too absurd to be professed by rational men, and her claims to infallibility charged as an illiberal accusation of her enemies.' A very few years after these sentences were written, what would the writer have said, if he, or rather she, for I believe it was written by a woman, could have beheld in a vision what is now going on in England?"

"I suppose that at the time you joined the Church of Rome you did not anticipate the wonderful development of Catholicism in our Church?"

"I certainly did not foresee to what an extent Catholic doctrines and practices would be adopted by Anglicans, or what strenuous efforts they would make to reconcile them with the articles and formularies of the Church of England."

"You would not, perhaps, have abandoned it had you known the great change about to take place amongst us?"

"If anything could have conduced to strengthen my resolution, it would have been that foresight."

"I cannot understand that."

"All that has taken place since I became a Catholic has only served to show me more clearly than ever that there can be only one Visible Church, and the absolute necessity of a living authority in matters of faith. Every revival amongst you of Catholic doc-

trine, every adoption of Catholic practices, proves to me the perfect consistency of the Roman Catholic Church; and that all she teaches and enjoins is the necessary consequence of the principles laid down by the original promoters of the Catholic movement in your communion."

"I cannot understand that, unless you assume that we have not the same right to Catholic usages, and, if I must use the word, developments, as yourselves. We maintain just as much as you do that there is only one Visible Church, one Catholic Church, and that it has authority to teach. We say that it is the duty of individuals to submit to her teaching, and that to separate from this one Church is a sin—the sin of schism. I consider these points to be settled and assumed on both sides. The difference between us is not so much in the doctrines, we believe, although we certainly hold you to be in error on several points; but as to the Catholicity of our branch of the one universal Church, we assert that it has preserved the Catholic faith far more free from corruption and additions than the Church of Rome, and that it has a claim, as the English Church, to the obedience of all English persons."

"Don't you think we had better separate the two questions of our supposed corruptions and of your own Catholicity? I hardly see how our faults can make you Catholics.—Now, I know you maintain, in order to make good your theory, that your Church is one with the Catholic Church all over the world, and on that assumption alone can its claims to authority be established. The fact remains, that she is isolated, condemned, and disowned by the whole of the Catholic Church; and yet you pretend that she belongs to it so thoroughly that you can, as an Anglican, profess to believe in the existence of one Catholic and Apos-

tolical Church, not in the Protestant sense of an invisible union between all who call themselves Christians, but in a *bonâ fide* real visible union."

"But we say that in all essential points, in all that is necessary to salvation, there is a perfect agreement between the Roman and the Anglican branches of the Catholic Church. All that has been everywhere and at all times received as necessary to be believed is taught by the Church of England as by your Church; but the latter has added to the faith, has corrupted its purity and imposed unwarrantable terms of communion. On her the onus of separation lies."

"There again you are going off the point, at least in what you say as to purity of faith. As to unwarrantable terms of communion, do you mean by speaking of these to acknowledge that you are in schism, but not through your own fault?"

Edgar paused. "There is schism between us, but it is on account of your corruptions, which are imposed on us as terms of communion."

"The Church, then, is no longer really one?"

"It is one invisibly and really, because its parts agree on all necessary points. It is not one outwardly, because we are divided on account of your corruptions."

Ita looked at her husband with trouble in her face. He seemed to have contradicted himself.

Mr. Neville resumed. "So, then, our corruptions are great enough to justify you in schism, but they are not great enough to make any material difference between us?"

"There is a state of schism between us. We have not separated from you, but you from us. The blame lies with those who have corrupted the faith."

"I see," said Mr. Neville, "I must let you have your own way. So as to these corruptions, then. This

brings us back to the question of authority. Who is it that rules the faith to have been corrupted? What tribunal has pronounced on that question? And how many are there even amongst the members of your own party whose witness will be found to agree so as to find a verdict on that head. Who are there amongst you who will exactly agree, and clearly and unanimously state when, where, and to what extent, the Church of Rome has corrupted the faith?"

"We appeal to antiquity—to the Catholic Church before the separation of East and West."

"But if there is no living Church with power to judge and decide on controverted points, there is an end to all authoritative teaching. You appeal to tradition against the witness and guide to tradition; and why may not individuals among yourselves appeal to Scripture against your Church's interpretation of Scripture? and if this is allowed, then there is an end to all belief in a visible teaching Church."

"We hold what antiquity held."

"And how do you ascertain what antiquity did hold?"

"By the unanimous consent of the Fathers."

"But amongst yourselves—I do not even speak of your bishops, or of the majority of your clergy—but amongst your own High Church Puseyite party—can you arrive at a unanimous agreement as to what has been the consent of the Fathers, or as to who are the Fathers whose testimony you are prepared to receive?"

"We can arrive at the conviction that the Fathers would never have sanctioned modern Romish innovations."

"This is at best a negative kind of faith. And will you let me ask you whether your own Church sanctions your interpretation of her articles—whether it does

not accuse you of corrupting the faith by human traditions? Do not your bishops, even while they admit that you are the most zealous and hard-working of your clergy, lament the opinions you hold, and deprecate the course you pursue? Forgive me for speaking thus freely. You know I did not begin this discussion, and should not have thought of plunging into it at the outset of our acquaintance, if you had not yourself led the way to it."

Edgar smiled, and said, "I suppose that when the mind is very much occupied with a particular subject, as is the case with both of us, that it is difficult to be long together before beginning to speak of it. I am not at all afraid of being shaken by your arguments. My conviction of the Catholicity of the Church of England is founded not only on what appears to me sufficient outward evidence, but on the most unmistakable inward experience. But you interrupted yourself just now to apologize for what you were going to say. Pray do not hesitate to express all your thoughts."

"I was going to say that it passes my comprehension how sincere men—and I quite believe you and some others of your way of thinking are sincere—can take upon yourselves the responsibility of teaching people doctrines which, to say the least of it, are ambiguously stated in your formularies, apparently denied in your Articles, and condemned by the bishops of the Church you profess yourself to be taught and guided by. How can you tell your parishioners, 'Do not believe what it seems to you the articles of religion in your Prayer-book teach. Believe what we tell you they mean, or rather do not mean. Do not believe your bishop, who says we are wrong. We are right—believe us?"

"Believe us!" Edgar exclaimed. "Believe us, be-

cause we teach you what the Catholic Church has always and still teaches all over the world—what has been believed in every age and in every part of the Church."

"And how, I say, are they to know, those to whom you say this, that what you tell them is true. You are nothing more than individuals, condemned by the superiors and the majority of your own body, and by the whole of the Roman Catholic Church. You stand alone, acting on your own responsibility, taking for granted, on your own authority, what you assert, assuming a position and maintaining a theory which many amongst you have held only for a comparatively short time. You expect your parishioners to accept, on the one hand, your charges against Protestantism, in opposition to the opinions of your bishops and the great majority of your own communion, and on the other hand your accusations against the Church of Rome, in opposition to the judgment of some of the holiest, wisest, and most learned men the world has ever known; of saints, martyrs, and doctors, teaching one and the same doctrine, and supported by the voices of nearly one thousand living bishops, and the whole of the Catholic world in communion with St. Peter. Is not this enough to make you hesitate to trust in your own views and those of your friends in the Anglican Church? Are you not struck with the fact, that no one takes the same view of your position as yourselves?"

"Some members of your own Church have done so."

"If they do, they cease to be Roman Catholics, though they may call themselves such, and continue to frequent our churches; but you will not find that members of the Greek Church, though themselves divided from the Latin Church, or Protestants of any denomination, or Jews or even Infidels, will allow you

to be Catholics, or understand the theory by which you seek to establish your claim to that position. Then, many amongst yourselves, whose dearest and strongest interest it was to continue to hold it, have felt themselves constrained to abandon it. Does not all this make you doubt, waver, at least, in your reliance on your own impressions on the subject?"

Edgar glanced at his wife. He saw that she was listening with the deepest attention to Mr. Neville's arguments. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes fixed on the ground, but now and then raised to his face when he uttered some of the thoughts which had sometimes passed through her mind. Her husband knew her countenance too well not to perceive that she was deeply interested in the discussion. But he felt so confident of the truth of his own convictions, that, on the whole, he did not regret this opportunity of confuting a Romanist in her presence. Mr. Neville's manner was not offensive. It was earnest and vehement, but neither scornful nor flippant, and he felt an irresistible desire to continue the conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

INSTEAD of directly replying to his opponent's last words, Edgar said, "It is a matter of absolute certainty that we have the Apostolical Succession, and as the Church of England has also the true faith, once for all, delivered to the saints, there is nothing to impair her authority over us, and in her we have the Sacraments and whatever else we need to be saved."

"Hardly whatever else you need to be saved if you have not *unity*. Remember what St. Paul says about all divine gifts if charity be wanting. You *might* have all these things you specify, as I suppose the Donatists had, and yet be lost. You have described an ideal Church, guilty of schism and nothing else. However, though rambling in argument usually leads to nothing, I will take up your position as you put it; you may have an absolute conviction that you have the Apostolical Succession, but that conviction is not shared by dispassionate persons outside your Church, who have studied the question. As a rule, it is disbelieved by Roman Catholics, and some of your own communion doubt the fact. The most that has ever been conceded by Catholics on that point is, that the case is a doubtful one, because it depends on a number of facts as to which evidence is either wanting or imperfect. Your assertion is, therefore, simply a begging of the question. But, granting that it was ever so true and certain, that fact would not decide the Catholicity of the English Church; again, the question would still

remain whether the succession was held in heresy or schism. I suppose you do not hold that a body, having the succession, cannot be heretical or schismatical?"

"Not absolutely; but I do maintain that there is a strong presumption in favour of its orthodoxy, and corroborative evidence is not wanting, The Church of England is a great fact. It bears the tokens of a work of God, of a step in the course of His Providence for the furtherance of some great design in the world. Its history contains such remarkable evidences of His fostering care and supernatural grace, that I cannot understand how anyone can abandon it without running great risk of abandoning Him. I speak as freely to you as you have done to me."

"Of course; we are both in earnest, and cannot be hurt or offended if we each express fully our thoughts."

"Well, if in my opinion this has always been the case, how much more is it so now, when in such a striking way He has moved, and is moving, the minds of men within her, calling them to the knowledge of higher truths, to a sense of deeper wants, to a fuller appreciation of the means of grace? Does not this show that He looks favourably upon her? that He has some work for her to do? Yes. I appeal to you who left us, indeed, before all this was as plain as it is now; can we destroy, as far as in us lies, this work? You have expressed without reserve, your opinion of the shortcomings of my Church, and I will not hesitate to state my belief that God is preparing her for the high office of first regenerating our own nation, and then recalling to truth and purity the corrupt Church of the continent."

Ita's face had lighted up when Edgar had spoken of the work of grace in the Church of England; but his last words pained her, and she turned towards Mr. Neville, anxiously looking for his answer.

"It is not enough," he said, when Edgar paused, "to ask these questions, and to take it for granted that a review of the past, and the contemplation of the present, will lead to such conclusions or justify such hopes. I can assure you that, for my own part, such a review and such a contemplation convince me more than anything else of the utter fallacy of your expectations. Reading the signs of the times, and the history of the past in the light of the present, I cannot help seeing in them the very contrary lessons to those by which Anglicans would dissuade people from leaving the English Church. I believe the recent movement in the heart of members of that Church, at a time when the voice of Catholics scarcely ever reached their ears, has been a call from God to rise up and return to their true mother, and their true home. I am convinced that the strange rise and sudden spread of Catholic ideas amongst us is intended to prepare the way for the reception of the Catholic system in the only way in which it really can and does exist. It has been, as it were, a clue dropped at our feet to guide us out of a labyrinth of difficulties into the plain path of truth."

"Your view of the subject, and mine," Edgar replied, "certainly proves how possible it is for two persons to draw contradictory deductions from the same fact. But, after all, the internal evidence is to those who possess it more conclusive than any external argument; and our blessed Lord has so spoken to us in and through the Sacraments of our Church, that He has, as it were, told us that He is there of a certainty. Ita, you are no theologian, but I am sure you will confirm what I assert: Have we not unmistakable evidence that, in Holy Communion, for instance, we receive graces which we should feel it blasphemy to deny?"

"Oh, yes! whatever else we might doubt about, we could never deny that," Ita exclaimed. She was glad Edgar had appealed to her on a point on which she could give the answer he expected.

"But neither I nor any one else would ask you to deny it," Mr. Neville said. "The reality of Sacraments is one thing, the reality of grace another. It is commonly taught by theologians that spiritual communion, that is, an ardent desire to receive the Blessed Sacrament, confers grace sometimes equal in degree to what might have been received by sacramental communion. In the case of devout Greeks and Anglicans who approach to receive their respective communions, ignorant of the schismatical or heretical character of their respective churches, and with a real faith and ardent desire to receive our Lord, we should hope that the Greek would receive grace through sacramental participation of the Holy Eucharist actually present on the Greek altars, and the Anglican through desire of the Sacrament as if our Lord were to say, 'According to thy faith so be it done to thee.' I suppose you would urge Dissenters in England to join your Church, as you say that not to obey her is to incur the sin of schism?"

"Certainly."

"Well then, might they not give just the same answer to you as you give to me? That they are sure that our Lord is with them with His grace where they are. And should you wish or be able to deny it?"

"No, so long as they do not see the guilt of the state in which they find themselves."

"Exactly; and that then is the answer which the Catholic Church makes to you. In answering her you use the answer which the Dissenter makes to you, and in answering the Dissenter you use the answer which the Church makes to you. You see the question cannot be settled by inward experience; it is one of fact.

God is very good to all who are in good faith. But when once a Greek or an Anglican had come to see the true constitution of the Church and the untenability of the position claimed by his communion, he could not then on any account delay his submission to the Church of Rome, because being no longer in good faith, the stream of sanctifying grace would have ceased to flow for him."

Ita was listening with her head resting on her hands. At that moment the thought crossed her mind how at one time, especially during the winter before her marriage, the reception of the Sacraments in the Anglican Church had seemed to convey more grace to her soul than had been subsequently the case. Was it that, in those days, she accepted in perfect good faith the teaching which since she had felt it impossible altogether to accept? Were those doubts sins, on account of which grace had been withdrawn? or, on the other hand, was she resisting grace by turning practically a deaf ear to them?

This is the perplexing question which presents itself in so harassing a manner to many members of the Anglican communion, when they begin to feel misgivings as to the truth of what at one time they fully believed. To one as ignorant about religion as Ita was when she first made acquaintance with Edgar, the Anglican theory offered no difficulties. She had not hesitated to accept whatever he taught her with humble docility and eager sympathy. Since her marriage she had heard, read, and thought a great deal. The controversies carried on in Church newspapers and magazines, and her husband's extensive correspondence with members of the High Church party, had necessarily made her acquainted with the view which those outside the English communion took of its claims to be a branch of the Catholic Church and a teacher of

truth, and also with the innumerable differences of opinion existing on important points, even amongst Edgar's own friends and members of his own school and party. The way in which some of them spoke of their bishops; the evasions and shifts they resorted to in order to reconcile the teaching of Catholic doctrines and the observances resulting from them with the prohibitions of ecclesiastical superiors; the use of certain expressions to disguise the obvious meaning of certain practices, pained and distressed her simple, frank, and loving nature: and whether it was that her increasing sense of this inconsistency dried up the spring of devotion in her heart, or that she was unfaithful to the new light dawning in her soul, certain it was that as time went on she derived less and less benefit from Anglican ordinances.

What Edmund Neville had said awakened also a second thought still more startling than the first. In her passionate love for her husband she had sometimes had a daring, reckless—if we did not hope that God looks with pity on the wild impulses of human affection, we should add an impious—feeling, that she had rather as it were take her chance of salvation with Edgar than separate herself from him in this world and the next. Now the idea for the first time powerfully struck her that he might be in perfect good faith, and consequently safe in his present position, whereas she might be running the risk of losing her own soul by stifling the voice of God calling her to the true Church. If she and Edgar were both to die that night, and appear at the judgment seat of Christ, perhaps he would be acquitted even if he had been in error on account of his sincerity, and she . . . . how was it with her? Was she so entirely convinced of all she had been trying hard to believe as to the Catholicity of the English Church, so sure that the handful

of men in that Church who held it were right, and the whole Catholic world who denied it, wrong, that she could plead conviction on that point at the supreme tribunal of God, where every heart is laid open and no sophistry will avail. There was a time when she could have done so, but conscience whispered that that time was past . . . . She was so absorbed in these reflections that for a few minutes she lost the thread of the conversation going on between Edgar and Edmund Neville. Her attention was roused by the emphatic manner in which the former exclaimed: "But the unbending theory of Rome cannot be reconciled with existing facts. You assert that those who are not in communion with your Church form no part of the visible Catholic Church, and yet you cannot deny that graces from Christ and visible good works, which are the fruits of grace, are found outside the unity of the Roman Church."

"We are quite ready to admit this, as I have already said," Mr. Neville answered, "whenever the facts can be proved, and we fully admit many of the alleged facts, but this falls in completely with the doctrine of the Church concerning the visible and the invisible Church. St. Augustine has summed up all we could say on this point in his distinction between the soul and body of the Church, expressing his hope that at the last day many will be found to have belonged to the invisible Church who never formed part of the visible children, will be judged for their own personal participation in heresy or schism not for the heresy or schism of their fathers. If they have been validly baptized they have been regenerated in the Christ and united to the soul of the Church, and they continue so till by their own act they knowingly and wilfully reject the truth and unity of the Church."

"You do then admit the fact that in the Church of

England the Holy Ghost works with undeniable grace and efficacy?"

"I admit it just in the same way as I believe He does wherever men of good will and in good faith, according to the light given to them, seek to serve and please God with humble and sincere hearts. But you must excuse me if I consider that the Pasteur Oberlin, for instance, or any good Presbyterian or Methodist, is just as likely to belong to the soul of the Catholic Church as the members of the Anglican communion."

"It would be the greatest of calamities to me," Edgar replied, "if—which you have not yet done—you could succeed in shaking my faith in the Catholicity of our Church, because I must plainly tell you that it would be an impossibility for me to join the Church of Rome."

"And why so?"

"Because it would involve straining my conscience to believe what I know to be false, and, moreover, which I know that not only the Primitive but the Medieval Church knew to be so. The English Church, no doubt, teaches three or four Catholic doctrines less clearly and plainly than could be wished; it teaches them indistinctly, if you will, but still it does teach them. On the other hand, Rome now forces on us three or four doctrines which St. Bernard, St. Thomas of Aquinas, and St. Bonaventure would have thought blasphemous. How then can I do otherwise than stay where I am?"

"Will you tell me what the doctrines are to which you refer?"

"The Roman Church gives communion to the laity under one kind only. Those who leave the Anglican Church to join it, renounce half the sacrament instituted by our Lord; give up the privilege of receiving the precious blood, and exchange a perfect for a mutilated ordinance."

"But do you mean to say that the giving the Communion in one kind to all but the celebrant, is a doctrine which St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure would have called blasphemous? It is not a doctrine but a practice, involving, if you like, a precious doctrine, which both of these saints believed, and which perhaps *you* do not deny. St. Thomas in the 'Lauda, Sion,' expresses it in these words,

'Manet tamen Christus totus
Sub utraque specie.'

"I might, however, content myself with replying that on this point, like on all others, the real question at issue is, whether the Church of God, the pillar and ground of truth, has authority or not to decide whether any change in the form of administering a sacrament maims it in any substantial particular or not. I grant you that communion in both kinds was the usual primitive practice, though even then communion under the form of wine only was given to newly-baptized infants—and communion under the form of bread only was permitted to be carried from the churches by lay persons, to adore and communicate themselves with in secret in the days of persecution."

"I know that perfectly well," Edgar interrupted. "But why, when there is no necessity for denying the cup to the laity, was the practice enjoined which had been resorted to in the early ages of the Church only in cases of necessity?"

"So now it comes down to this, that what you first call blasphemous doctrine is a practice which may be justified by necessity, but as to which, in the present case, you do not see the necessity. It became a general custom in the Western Church, and the Church having always held that although both kinds were essential to the sacrifice, either kind alone sufficed

for communion tolerated the usage. In the course of time what had been permitted became enjoined, partly because it is much more difficult to guard against accidents in giving communion to a large number of persons under the form of wine than under the form of bread, and that it became a very serious difficulty in times when there was little commercial intercourse between one country and another, to provide sufficient wine for the communions of whole populations; whereas, wheat is a product of every region, and partly as a protest against the erroneous belief that in receiving under one kind only, we do not receive Christ as He is in heaven, our living and glorified Lord. His Soul, His Body, and His Blood united inseparably with one another, and with His Divinity."

"Still I do not see how you reconcile this mutilation of the Sacrament with our Lord's words in the gospel."

"I must again remind you that you are not speaking of mere difficulties as to which you are not clear, but of doctrines and practices which so revolt your conscience, that they are of themselves sufficient to prevent your acceptance of the authority of the Church which insists on them. Suppose the Anglican Church had retained the practice as to this matter which it found at the Reformation, would you on that account refuse to belong to her?"

Ita was inclined to say, "I wish it had," for she had been very much shocked, both in England and abroad, by the way in which she had seen the chalice handled at the Anglican communion. She checked herself, however, and, as Edgar did not reply, Mr. Neville continued:—

"I suppose, by the words of the gospel, you mean those of institution. I could answer that we do per-

fectly reconcile this practice with our Lord's words, seeing that we apply his commandment to the institution of the Sacrifice of the Mass, in which the priest must receive in both kinds. But let me ask you, do you not give up your own principles when you advance in argument the apparent meaning—that is, what appears to you the apparent meaning—of a text of Scripture in opposition to the decisions of the Church? If you use this method of reasoning, Dissenters may, on the same grounds, reject every Catholic doctrine. There is not a single one which has not been controverted by some sect or other, on the ground of their own interpretation of some words of the Bible."

"Well, it was rather in a corroborative than a positive manner that I supported what I hold to be true Catholic doctrine, by a reference to the text of Scripture."

"Will you let me ask you this question, Mr. Derwent—Do you believe, or not, that when Catholics . . . ."

"Roman Catholics?" Edgar interrupted.

Mr. Neville smiled. "I glory in the name of Roman; but when I use it I must add the protest, that I consider no one as a Catholic who is not a Roman Catholic. Do you believe, or not, that when Roman Catholics go to communion they receive Christ our Lord whole and undivided?"

Mr. Derwent hesitated. "I do not wish to decide," he said, after a pause, "how far or not this may be the case."

"But surely," Mr. Neville exclaimed, "if you impugn the doctrine of the Church on this point, you should have a clear and decided belief on this subject. Just now you gave this as an instance of a doctrine that would prevent you in any case from becoming a Catholic."

"I have a settled conviction that it must be a loss to members of your communion not to receive under both kinds; but this is but one of the difficulties I spoke of just now. Your modern idea of Purgatory, for instance, is most repulsive, and not at all in accordance with the sweet and beautiful expressions in the primitive and medieval liturgies concerning the middle state of souls. You hold that it is for some a purification by suffering. There is a horrible line in one of your popular hymns, which speaks of their enduring 'Pain above all earthly pain.'"

"We are going on to a second point before we have settled the first. This is not the way to come to a conclusion, but I must follow your arguments wherever they may lead me. As to Purgatory, then, I maintain, and I could allege a number of passages to prove, that this doctrine was taught both in the Primitive and the Medieval Church. St. Clement of Alexandria, in the second century, speaks of 'a faithful man passing to the severest suffering, and punished still more (whilst he attains not yet, or not at all, to those things which he sees others partaking) for the completion of the penalty for sins committed after baptism.' And St. Augustine, speaking of those who will be saved yet, so as by fire, adds, 'because it is said, "Thou shalt be saved," that fire is despised, yet assuredly, though "saved by fire," that fire will be more grievous than anything that man can suffer in this life.' These are actually the very words of the hymn you quoted."

"I shall look out for both those passages. I had either never read or never noticed them. There is, however, to my mind, something contradictory between St. John's words, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,' and the idea of souls suffering after death."

"If that is all you can say against us, we may leave this point, for you cannot mean that this is a blasphemous doctrine, which you could never accept. For my part, I cannot see anything in the Catholic doctrine on that point inconsistent with the Apostle's words. 'Those who die in the Lord'—that is, in the grace of God united to Him, and free from the stains of sin—are blessed in the immediate enjoyment of the beatific vision after death. Those who, though united to God by sanctifying grace, have yet need of purification, have yet some 'wood, and hay, and stubble' that has to be burnt in the fire, are also blessed, because they enjoy the certainty that they are saved, though they may have to suffer greater pains, deeper sorrow, from hope delayed, than we can form an idea of in this world; yet this is perfectly compatible with a feeling of most intense blessedness, from the consciousness that they are united to God, and that nothing can separate them from Him. Would not the severest pain be endured with joy even on earth, if we knew it was hourly bringing us nearer to one . . . . whom we had loved . . . . to one we felt ourselves to be utterly unworthy of; but whom, through patient suffering, we hope one day . . . ."

Mr. Neville's voice faltered, and he broke off suddenly in the midst of his sentence.

Both Edgar and Ita felt for him. The former said gently, in a low voice—

"Yes; I can understand that in some cases suffering might be happiness."

Mr. Neville looked up quickly, and said—

"And that explains Purgatory. And now go on to your next difficulty; you spoke of three or four, I think. Is it the worship of the Blessed Virgin?"

"Yes, it is the attitude of the Roman Church with regard to her that I think startling, really dreadful.

St. Bonaventure and St. Bernard would have shrunk with horror at the modern language of Rome with regard to St. Mary."

"Will you give me some instances of the sort of things you think would have shocked those saints."

"I mean such assertions as that some things are impossible to the Son, nothing impossible to the Mother; or, again, that if we must choose an advocate with the Father, it should be rather the Mother than the Son."

"My dear Mr. Derwent, I deny that any approved Catholic author can ever have said these things. It would be impossible for any Catholic who had learnt his Catechism ever to utter such words in the sense that you attach to them. If they were said by Catholics, the Church would condemn them. As to St. Bernard, I could perfectly understand that if you looked at the subject in the light that Protestants do, how some of the things he says about the Blessed Virgin might startle and distress you, but I cannot conceive what you can find in the modern Catholic devotions stranger than some of his sayings: for instance, in his sermon on the Nativity he writes, 'Take away the Sun which enlightens the world, and where is the day? Take away Mary, the star of the sea, and what remains but darkness and the shadow of death?' And in another page of the same sermon, 'With all our hearts and affections, then, with all our desires let us venerate Mary, for such is His will who would that we should receive every thing through her.' And, again, in another place, 'Go then to Mary. The Son will hear the Mother and the Father will hear the Son. This is the ladder of sinners; this is my chief confidence. This is the only reason of my hope.' I will freely own to you that I had been for some years a Catholic before I knew at all how emphatic are the

expressions of the early fathers of the Church of those who lived during the centuries, which the Anglican Church holds to have preserved the faith in all its purity on the subject of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Nothing in St. Alphonsus Liguori's works exceeds, if indeed it comes up to, what is to be found in their writings."

"I cannot get over the feeling," Edgar said, "that the worship of the Blessed Virgin, carried as far as it is in the Roman Church, must interfere with that devotion to our Blessed Lord, which ought entirely to fill and absorb our hearts."

"I have two remarks to make in reply to this observation of yours. First, I would ask you whether the firmest faith in the Divinity of our Lord and the strongest personal love for His sacred Humanity are to be found amongst those who ignore the privileges and blame the practice of invoking the Blessed Virgin, or amongst those who love and pray to her? Whether devotion to our Lord's Passion and the habit of constant meditation on the mysteries of His life and death are most prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church, or in Protestant communions? Whether in proportion to the utter neglect of the worship of the Blessed Virgin, Socinianism has not risen up amongst Protestants, and on the other hand, when as of late years in the Anglican Church there has been a return to a more intense realization of the doctrine of the Incarnation, it has not been immediately accompanied by a return also of tenderness and reverence towards the Mother of our Blessed Lord?"

Ita raised her eyes to her husband with an expression which said as plainly as if the words had been spoken, "You can give but one answer to that question."

At last he said, "I honour and love the Blessed

Virgin; it is the position you give her I object to."

"But this is not the reply to my question. What I urge is, that it is that position which *we* give her which produces the results I mentioned just now. I ask you if facts do not justify my assertion. Is our Blessed Lord more highly honoured, more recognized as God? Is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity preserved in its fullest integrity by those who refuse to honour His Mother, or by those whom you think pay her undue honour? That is the question. I maintain that in every sect which has abandoned the worship of Mary—I need not, in speaking to you, stop to explain in what sense we use that word—the doctrines of the Incarnation, of the Divinity of our Lord and of the Holy Trinity have gradually become obscured, and ended by being denied. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the bulwark of the fundamental principles of Christianity; wherever it is given up, slowly but gradually these principles disappear."

"I attribute this decay to the absence of Church principles, not to the cause you allege. It is disobedience to authority—it is the lawlessness of private judgment—which has undermined Christianity in Protestant sects, and brought about so many evils, even in our Catholic and Apostolical Church; but what was the second observation you intended to make?"

"I meant to ask you whether those who love any one person ardently, do not also, on that account, love dearly all who belong to that person; and whether they feel that these other affections interfere with the one which has called them forth? Does, for instance, the grandfather who dotes on his daughter's child, love her the less because of the affection he lavishes on her infant? On the contrary, when we love others intensely, do not our hearts warm towards all those

they love or who love them? Why should it be different in the case of the highest, holiest, and tenderest feeling of our nature? Why should our love for Mary, which must necessarily and only proceed from love for her Divine Son, diminish it? What a poor mean fear that is of loving God less because we love also the most beautiful, perfect, and dearest work of His hands! According to this narrow view, a soul without affection for any human being would be most capable of loving its Creator. I, for one, could never believe that doctrine. I think that the more tenderly we look upon men on earth, and on the saints, the angels, and the Blessed Mother of God in Heaven, the more will our hearts expand in adoring devotion towards the great God Who has made them and us. Many have practically felt this. Many who once never thought of Mary, and who, through thinking of her, have acquired a new, different, personal feeling for our Lord. You speak of experience. I wish you would believe us!" Mr. Neville exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself. "We who have crossed the border! We who have entered the promised land! We know what you do not know! We see what you cannot see! And our experience is supported by a large and unanimous Church, whereas yours rests only on a small section of persons who happen to agree with you in your own body; and, if I may speak generally as to converts, their experience is that of persons whose convictions have been tested by great sacrifices."

"You left our Church before she had sprung up, as it were, from her ashes," Edgar exclaimed with emotion. "You cannot understand what we feel for our spiritual mother." He glanced at Ita, expecting a responsive look, but she had covered her eyes with her hands, and sat with her head bent down.

None of them spoke for a few instants. Then

Edmund Neville said in a different tone, "At Nice we should never have been able to argue so quietly—the air is too exciting. Mentone has such a soothing climate that it helps one to be good tempered."

Ita, glad that he had changed the subject, looked up and smiled. "I think it makes one a little idle, too," she said. "And yet the peasants seem a hard-working race."

"They are so," Mr. Neville answered. "The women, especially; the distances they walk, and the loads they carry, are really wonderful."

"I hope," Ita said, "the boy from Castellar, who used to bring us cones, will hear of my return. He used to come to the villa every week with a bag full of them. If not, I shall have to buy them in the town. As Edgar cannot have a regular English fire for Christmas, I mean to make him a beautiful extravagant one all made of cones. It used to be one of my childish wishes to make such a fire. It will look like a mountain of blazing pine-apples, and the perfume will be delicious. It is getting rather late now, I think we had better, perhaps, be moving."

They strolled slowly on the beach on their homeward way, enjoying the varying lights on the sea and in the sky. Edgar could not help liking Edmund Neville; he thought him intelligent and refined. Before they parted, he asked him to dine with them on the following day.

CHAPTER V.

On their way home, the Derwents met the Abate Giovanni—Pré Gian, as he was called in the Mentonese dialect. He was an old acquaintance of Ita's, and was delighted to see her. She introduced him to Edgar.

"So she had been married for more than two years! Well, how time did fly—she did not look much older for all that! Did she not find Mentone much altered? Ah! people were building away very fast. There was a new hotel springing up, and five or six villas just finished. What would they come to at last? How pleased Antonia must have been to see her Signorina. And Maddalena, he was sure, would walk from Nice, one of these days, to pay her a visit. The villa had been let to English people the last two winters, but Antonia was always complaining of the *padrona's* absence. Ah! they had been to the Capo, and yesterday to the Annunziata. Brava! Monsieur did not look very strong; but the climate, with the help of God, would soon make him quite well. He was so tall, and tall people are not generally as strong as short ones, like himself—but, perhaps, that was not the case in England, where, he supposed, everybody was tall—but he would not keep them standing in the cold. He should call upon them some day soon," and, with a kind smile, the Abbé left them.

"What a venerable, amiable-looking man," Edgar said, and Ita was pleased.

On the following day Mr. Neville came to dinner, and a good deal of interesting conversation, without any approach to controversy, took place between him and Edgar. He spoke of the *festas* in the neighbouring villages which would take place after Christmas, and Ita, whose delight it had been to go to them in former years, was glad to hear her husband say that they should certainly try to spend St. Agnes's day at the little old town of that name. And when they were sitting alone together the next evening, she communicated to him a plan which had just entered her head. She wished to institute at Holmwood a festival in honour of the patron saint of their church, St. James the Apostle, and had been thinking over all the details of it. There was a sort of tacit compromise unconsciously going on between her and Edgar at that time. When she saw him vexed at some manifestation of her strong Roman Catholic predilections, she used to propitiate him by proposing to transplant some of her favourite customs or observances into the Church of England in general, and Holmwood church in particular. He was always relieved by her enthusiasm taking that form, and in consequence received these suggestions more graciously than he might have otherwise done.

On this occasion he said, "But do not you remember, darling, that we have kept St. James's day as a festival these last two years. We had red and white roses on the altar. Annie gave us leave to gather as many as we could find. They were very much gone off, but we spoiled her garden of all that remained, and the school-children had a feast."

"Oh yes; but what I want is to get the people about us, rich and poor, to take an interest in the festival, and come to church as they do here from a distance, and make the day in every way a pleasant

one. I think it is so nice when religion is connected with enjoyment, and poor people have so few pleasures."

Edgar smiled and said, "But how would you propose to make our staid country-people merry on the occasion?"

"We might have a fair on the green after the service."

"That would not amuse them much, I think."

"I should like to try, and then the school-children might act a little play in a tent, as they did in the hall at Christmas. May I have St. James's day this year to do what I like with?"

"That is a bold request," Edgar said, laughing. "If you do not interfere with the hours of Church Service, and allow Roland and me to have a veto on your proceedings, you and Eliza may do your best or your worst out of doors. And, indeed, I think you had better try the experiment at Bramblemoor than at Holmwood. I am not sure Annie would like it."

"She likes anything you like."

"Yes, she is very good and kind. God bless her," Edgar answered, with a scarcely perceptible sigh. "I wish she was married!"

"Do you," Ita said. "Would she be happier do you think?"

"Why don't you think she would?"

"I am not sure. I am going to say a strange thing, but Annie loves Holmwood, and everything about it with an intensity which would almost interfere, I fancy, with her happiness as a wife. She never likes to be anywhere else. It is the only object of her thoughts. She does not care to see anybody but us. Do you know, Edgar, that she wishes us to have children more even than we wish it ourselves. She has told me that there is nothing would make her so

happy. I should be afraid, if we had a little child, that she would want to keep it all to herself. I think her affection for you is the most beautiful, unselfish, and singular feeling possible."

Edgar looked at his wife's eager, sweet, expressive face, and thought more of it at that moment than even of poor Annie's feelings. He was as much in love with Ita as the day they had married.

"My own darling," he said, drawing her near him, "you are quite right; Annie's character is wonderfully unselfish and generous. She has been to me a friend such as is seldom met with in this world, and that is the reason why I long to see her as happy as we are."

"But do you think she could ever have been as happy as we are? If she had married you . . . ."

"Me! Oh, she would not have been happy with me. I could never have loved her as she deserves."

"Perhaps I am wrong, but I have a strong impression that she has the sort of fate that will, on the whole, make her happiest. That she would not now be happy in marriage. She knows you owe everything to her—your little wife, and all the blessings, comforts, and enjoyments which surround us—that home she has made so perfect; and I am sure this thought is a continual delight to her . . . ."

"But I want her to be loved, and to love as we love each other."

Ita pursed her lips and shook her head in a way that said, as plainly as words could have done, that she thought this a very wild, improbable, unreasonable wish, something quite beyond hoping for; and then, following up the unuttered thought, she said, "And besides that, I am sure that one who had ever loved you would never love very much any one else."

"Oh nonsense, wife of mine, you are in a strange delusion on that point."

"Not a bit of it. I do not say that you are better looking, or cleverer, or more excellent than anybody else in the world . . . ."

"No, really?" Edgar interrupted, laughing.

"But only . . . ."

"Only you are a little goose—a dear darling, perfect little goose;" and Edgar kissed his wife to stop the current of his own praises.

Just then the door opened, and the servant announced the Abate Giovanni. Ita greeted him very warmly, and Edgar very civilly; but he had made an appointment to go to Mr. Nilson's house at eight o'clock, and after a few minutes' conversation, he was obliged to excuse himself to the Abate on account of this engagement, but begged him not to shorten his visit to Ita, whom he knew would be delighted to have his company.

So when he went away, they began to talk of old times—the Abate spoke with feeling of poor Lady Emily's death—and said he had been glad to hear that Ita was married; her husband had a prepossessing exterior, and looked so good, that he felt sure he must be a very amiable man. "Was it true," he asked, "that he was an English clergyman?"

"Yes," she answered, "he was an Anglican clergyman."

The Abate sighed.

She hastened to say, "But he is not a Protestant, he is a Catholic, an Anglo-Catholic."

"Not a minister of the Church of England, then?"

"Yes, of the Catholic Church of England."

"But that is impossible, Signora. If he was an English Catholic priest he could not be married."

"He is not an English Roman Catholic priest, but a Catholic priest of the Anglican Church."

"But the Anglican Church is Protestant."

"No, Pré Gian," Ita eagerly rejoined, for she had learnt as a child from Antonia to call him so; "that is the mistake. It has been thought to be Protestant but it is really Catholic."

"We cannot be talking of the same Church, Signorina. I mean the Anglican Church or Church of England, to which the Reverend Nilson belongs."

"Oh yes, it is the same Church; but my husband thinks quite differently from Mr. Nilson. I assure you nothing can be more different. Edgar believes in the Real Presence and in Confession and Absolution . . . ."

"O brava!" the Abate exclaimed, "then he is really a Catholic; but then how can he be of the same religion as the Reverend Nilson, who tells our poor people that the Blessed Sacrament is nothing but a piece of bread, and that it is idolatry to kneel before It, and that they should not confess their sins to a priest, but only to God."

"Well, it is not the same religion, but it is the same Church."

"What, are there two religions in one Church?" the Abate asked, still more puzzled.

"Edgar says his religion, his way of thinking I mean —I suppose he would not quite admit about the two religions—is what the Anglican Church really teaches, and that what Mr. Nilson teaches is heresy."

"But then why does your Church let him teach it?"

"It cannot help it," Ita answered; "unfortunately some of our bishops think as he does."

"Strana Chiesa!" murmured the Abate. "But, Signorina, since you think it right to confess, whom do you confess to as you have no priests."

"But we have priests. My husband looks upon himself as a priest.'

"Indeed! and do you go to Confession to him?"

"No, but others do."

"And his bishop gives him faculties to hear confessions?"

"His bishop unfortunately does not approve of Confession. Very few of our bishops do. None of them are as Catholic as my husband and his friends, except one, perhaps, the Bishop of ——"

"Then your husband and his friends think they know better than their bishops?"

"Yes, because they believe what you do, what all the Catholic Church believes."

"But then why do they not become Catholics and join our Church?"

"Because they think you are wrong in some things, and that the Church of Rome has a little corrupted the faith."

"Ah! then about some things they know better than their bishops, and about others they know better than the whole Catholic Church. What clever men they must be! What Prayer-book do they use?"

"The Prayer-book of the Church of England."

"What you call the Common Prayer-book? The Reverend Nilson's Prayer-book?"

"Yes," Ita answered, vexed to admit that there was anything common between Edgar and Mr. Nilson.

"That good gentleman showed me one day an Italian translation of his Common Prayer-book, and I saw in it that your Articles of Religion say that the sacrifices of Masses are blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits! The Reverend Nilson told me that every minister of his Church was obliged to sign them."

"Yes, but they do not believe them; that is not in what seems to be their sense."

The Abate looked grave, and said, "I am not a learned man, Signorina, or a deep theologian, but it

appears to my plain common sense, the greatest folly and delusion imaginable for men to think they are Catholics who obey neither the Pope nor their own bishops, if they really have any; who remain in a Church that has no power to prevent its own ministers from teaching error—for if some of them tell their flocks that our Lord is really present in the Holy Eucharist, as you say your husband does, and others, like the Reverend Nilson, that it is superstitious and idolatrous to believe it, it is clear that one or the other must be teaching what is false—who use a Prayer-book which says one thing and means another, or means nothing at all, and sign articles of religion they do not believe to be true."

"But it is very likely my way of explaining the matter which makes it seem all wrong," Ita exclaimed. "It does sound very bad in the way you put it; but will you speak to my husband on the subject? He will explain it to you so much better than I can."

The Abate said he should be happy to converse with Mr. Derwent on that and any other topic, and then they spoke of other things. After he had taken leave of her, however, and as he was going towards the door, he stopped, turned round, and with a good-humoured smile on his shrewd Italian face, he said to Ita, "Pardon me, Signorina, but as an old friend allow me to ask you whether you really believe yourself that your husband is really and truly a priest?"

Ita blushed and hesitated. "I suppose he is a priest of the Anglican Church," she answered. "I certainly can never feel as if they were quite like Roman Catholic priests."

"I should think not," the Abate said, again smiling. "I have no doubt Mr. Derwent is a good husband and a very amiable gentleman, but as to his being a priest . . . ." He made an expressive

shrug, and bowing again to the clergyman's wife, left the room.

After he was gone, Ita sat down near the window watching for Edgar's return. The night was clear and cold, the stars wonderfully bright, the sea splashing on the pebbly shore, and the mountains, the town, and the woods lighted up by the moon almost as clearly as if it had been day. Just below the villa, on the spot where the hospice now stands, was a grove of ilexes, through which a winding path led from the road to the gate of the garden.

As she gazed on this well-known view, she thought on the strange chance which had made her, the foundling child of the sea, the wife of an English clergyman, and the question of the Abate haunted her. Did she believe Anglican ministers were really priests? did she look upon her own husband in that light? Once perhaps she had done so. In those early days at Bramblemoor she had reverenced him as a teacher and a guide without analyzing the exact nature of his position. She had felt for him an humble, timid, disinterested respect and affection which did not at all militate against the ideas she had unconsciously formed in a Catholic country of the priestly office and character; but when imperceptibly at first and then irresistibly that affection became more ardent and more tender, she shrank from associating a passionate human feeling with religious ministrations; and when that love which had once been hopeless was blessed beyond her hopes—when she became Edgar's wife, his darling, his treasure, when in the fulness of joy and mutual affection their lives were bound together in the holiest and most intimate union that can exist on earth, she felt less and less able to consider him as a priest. It seemed to her that consecration and sacrifice were involved in that office; that it called for a different kind of holiness than that of

married life. Every tender playful endearment, every passionate emotion, all the unreserved confidence of mutual affection was out of keeping with her idea of its sacredness. In using the name in relation to the Anglican clergy, she had gradually associated with it a perfectly different notion than the one she had formed of the Roman Catholic priesthood, but had never clearly drawn the distinction in her own mind. But the question she had just been asked had obliged her to do so, and she then realized her utter disbelief in the fact of Anglican orders. She felt that had she believed Edgar to be a priest, she could never have been his wife. The very thought was strange and repulsive. The more she loved him the more she hated it. But then what did this tend to? Where would it lead her?

There are moments in that irresistible progress of the mind towards an inevitable result, when we feel alarmed at the cogency of our own reasonings, when we long to shut out conviction like the prisoners in a sea-girt cave, to keep out the rising of the inexorable tide. Conviction was pressing upon her. She was aware of it, and tried to stem it by recalling some of the arguments her husband had opposed to Mr. Neville's; but, like slackened ropes which fail to support the hand which grasps them, they afforded her little help.

What desperate battles have thus been secretly fought in support of the Anglican theory, within the depths of many a soul whose whole freight of earthly joys and weal has been embarked in that sinking vessel! How it has played the devil's advocate against itself, and with what almost conscious evasions silenced the cry of awakened conscience. Let those who have never known any measure of this strange suffering, deal gently with others who are writhing under its pangs.

When Edgar came in he found his wife still sitting at the window, so absorbed in thought that she did not notice his approach. There were no lights in the room; she had forgotten to ring for them. He put his hand on her shoulder, and said, "So your friend is gone?"

"Oh yes, he has been gone some time," she answered; "I was very sorry you could not stay. I should have liked you to talk to him."

"I hope you explained to him that I was obliged to keep my appointment with Mr. Nilson. He had called here two or three times, and I had sent him word I should be with him at eight."

"Then, of course, you found him at home?"

"Yes, and his wife also. They seem good-natured people, but we did not touch on any subjects on which we should have been likely to disagree. Mrs. Nilson is coming to see you to-morrow."

"Is she?" Ita said, with a sigh. She owed Mrs. Nilson a grudge since the time when she was a very little girl. She had been left alone with her one day in the drawing-room, and the clergyman's wife had asked her, after a few exhortations, in the peculiar phraseology of the Evangelical school, if she thought she had found Jesus?

"Yes," Ita had answered, "I find Him at San Michele, when I go there with Antonia."

Mrs. Nilson had been dreadfully shocked, and with mild indignation remonstrated with Lady Emily on the danger of suffering that Italian nurse to take the child to church with her. This had caused a temporary prohibition on the subject, which had left an unpleasant impression on Ita's mind. She did not, however, mention this anecdote to Edgar, and made no comment on the announcement of Mrs. Nilson's visit.

There was one subject on her mind which she did not wish to speak of first, but about which she was very anxious to know what her husband's intentions were. It was Saturday, and what did he mean to do about church on Sunday? Would he go to San Michele or to Mr. Nilson's dining-room? While she was playing to him on her old piano all the tunes she could remember by heart, and afterwards reading aloud some numbers of the "Guardian," her mind was occupied with that doubt. The tone of the Puseyite paper annoyed her more than usual that evening. During the last few days she had become very sensitive to any attacks on the Church of Rome. Her cheeks flushed and her voice faltered when she had to read out what she thought unjust and one-sided statements. She did not, however, exclaim or protest against them. She was afraid of awakening in Edgar antagonistic feelings, for she had an instinctive conviction that the amount of respect for Roman Catholicism which his own theories obliged him to profess, would easily change into hostility if she manifested too openly her own predilections.

When they had finished reading that night there was a pause, and then Edgar said, "The service is at eleven o'clock to-morrow. As I expected, there is no early celebration."

Ita made no answer. She had rather hoped he would go to High Mass.

"They have advanced a step since your time," he continued. "The service is in a room dedicated, at least, to that purpose; not in Mr. Nilson's dining-room."

"And are we to go there to-morrow?"

"Yes, of course," he answered, looking surprised.

Ita's countenance fell. She hesitated a little, and then said, "But why not go to a real church when we

can do so? You used to say that abroad the Roman Catholic Church was *the* Catholic Church, as the Anglican Church is in England. Why, then, do we not go to San Michele, instead of to Mr. Nilson's service. *He* is certainly not a Catholic."

"Not, certainly, in his opinions; but though he may be unconscious of his own position and character, still he is a priest of the Church of England, and he celebrates the service she appoints. It is, therefore, our duty to attend that service as an act of obedience to our spiritual mother. There is no objection abroad to our occasionally attending Roman Catholic services, but our own must always have the first claim, even when the mode of performing it is distasteful to us."

The point was decided then. Ita made no further objection. It was a disappointment; but with her usual sweetness of temper she did not show it. Nobody had naturally a more docile disposition. Obedience to her husband was her constant habit in little as well as great things.

So the next morning, without a murmur, even though the bells of San Michele were ringing their most joyous peal, she walked with Edgar along the Via Lunga to the Piazza del Capo, and then up a steep flight of stairs to what went by the name of the Temple of the English. It was a long room with two rows of chairs divided by a narrow passage; a table covered with green baize stood before the window at the farthest end, with a chair on each side of it. The Common Prayer-book and a Bible on the reading-desk, and a few hymn-books scattered on the seats of the congregation, were the only visible signs of religious worship in this melancholy-looking chapel.

Ita resolved to suppress all feelings of discontent, and to attend the service with attention and devotion. It was always a happiness to her to kneel by Edgar's

side, to pour forth her soul in prayer in the same words he was using, and to hear his voice singing God's praises in unison with her own. With real humility she made an effort that day to find strength and peace in the performance of a religious duty; and perhaps, if no hymn had been sung, and no sermon preached, she might, to a certain extent, have succeeded. But when, on glancing over the page of a book which a lady by her side had civilly handed to her, she perceived that the hymn which had been given out was one of praise and thanksgiving for the Reformation, and its glorious author, the immortal Luther, a sick feeling of disgust came over her. How could she and Edgar be standing there joining in worship with those who honoured what they abhorred; who exulted in what they lamented! She looked at her husband and saw that he was moved. He looked flushed and annoyed. Then came the sermon. She did not care that Mr. Nilson preached in a black gown instead of a surplice. Those were not the little details that were a grief to her. She tried to be patient. She raised her heart to God, and sought to place herself in the frame of mind with which a sermon ought to be listened to. The text alarmed her, for she had an indistinct remembrance of the sort of comments Mr. Nilson used to make upon the Second Commandment, according to the Anglican version, part of the first in the Catholic one. Her apprehensions were justified. Every hackneyed charge of idolatry, every misapplication of the words of Scripture on the one hand, and misrepresentation of the practice of the Catholic Church on the other, were brought forward and urged in offensive and insulting terms; and assertions made which, from her own acquaintance with a Catholic population she knew to be false. The blood rushed into her face when the preacher spoke of the poor Papists and their

idolatrous religion. Her temples throbbed, and her heart beat with violence, when he went on to stigmatize Mass as an act of idolatry, and a blasphemous fable. It was more than she could bear. It could not be a good or holy spirit of endurance that could make them who called themselves Catholics join in worship with persons who thus designated the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which they themselves professed to believe in and to offer up, which could make them sit still and listen to the utterance of such painful words. She longed to get up and go. She looked again at Edgar. He had shaded his face with his hand, and she could not catch his eye.

She tried to pray, but it seemed a mockery of all religion to pretend to belong to the same Church as the minister who stood before them; yet he was appointed by an Anglican bishop, and he professed quite as much attachment to the Church of England as even Edgar could do. It seemed as if in that one discourse Mr. Nilson had contrived to say everything that could most shock and wound any one with Catholic feelings and opinions. After dwelling some time on what he called the idolatry of the Mass, he went on to speak of the Blessed Virgin as "that woman in no way different from other women, and who after the birth of Jesus Christ had had several other children."

Ita then stopped her ears, and cared not if others saw it. She could not, she would not, listen to the rest of the sermon, and felt quite ill with sorrow and vexation. Many who may read these pages will look upon this account of her feelings as an absurd exaggeration; but we appeal to all who have known what it is with Catholic feelings and sympathies to attend the services of the English Church, and hear a completely different faith preached, appealing equally with their own to her formularies, and with far more reason than

their own to her articles and homilies — to find the theories advocated in particular places, and by particular clergymen of their own school, breaking down when compared with the general practice and belief of the ministers and members of the Established Church; and what ought to be spiritual instruction given with authority by duly appointed teachers, a snare, a scandal, and a misery—something to be withstood, resisted, endured, put up with, or disclaimed in turns. "A cross," as the Puseyite leaders are wont to call it.

Not one of the small congregation assembled in that chapel probably felt as she, or even as Edgar did. They were used to Mr. Nilson's doctrine and style of preaching. Some of them, indeed, might perhaps think it tiresome of him always to attack the Roman Catholics; they might even consider it not quite charitable; but it did not otherwise shock them. They agreed on the whole with his views, though they would not perhaps have used such strong expressions.

Ita did not feel so angry with Mr. Nilson as pained that Edgar could, as it were, sanction by his attendance in his chapel the sentiments he uttered. She was not learned, nor very clever, but she had the good sense much less common than many people think, that makes a person see that two and two makes four, and an honesty of mind which is sometimes distinct from honesty of heart, but which in her case was united to it. If Mr. Nilson really thought what he said about Catholics he was quite right to preach against them. But that Edgar should belong to the same Church as him, that the same ecclesiastical authorities should depute them both to teach contradictory doctrines to its members, that they should be brother clergymen, as Mr. Nilson had said, in a note to her husband the day before;—this she could not reconcile with her simple ideas of truth and consistency.

At last the sermon came to an end. With a sense of escape Edgar and Ita went quickly out, and down the stairs, and then into the road leading to the olive groves. They felt it a relief to be out of doors, and walked on for some time in silence. Edgar looked gloomy. She did not regret it.

"What horrible trash that man preached!" he said, at last; "and those abominable Low Church hymns! What a scandal it is that such persons should be clergymen of our Church!"

Ita felt it too deeply to be able to say much. He went on abusing the sermon, and finding fault with the arrangement of the chapel. At last she said, "Edgar, I think sometimes that it will be impossible for me . . . ."

"To go there again?" he exclaimed. This was not what she was about to say, but he went on, "Well, I own I rather feel that myself. But, dearest, we must be patient. Rome was not built in a day."

The mention of Rome at that moment was somewhat unlucky; he hastened to add, "Catholic principles cannot spread in our Church quite as rapidly as we would wish. The very difference, the immense contrast you can yourself observe between the services at Holmwood and Bramblemoor, and many other places in England where church principles are now carried out, and such an exhibition of heresy as goes on here, shows you the wonderful progress we have already made. Some twenty years ago this sort of thing went on almost everywhere."

"Then people at that time had no chance of learning Catholic truth, and now how many there must be who have not any chance of it either!"

"But the number who have is increasing every day, and if the disloyal and misguided men who have left us had been true to our Church their number would, by this time, have been much greater."

"But is it not very bad for the soul to hear heresy preached by the very persons appointed to teach us?"

"Not if you are patient and accept it as a trial of your faith."

"But it seems to me a sort of trial that we ought not to accept."

"Well, do as you like, dearest Ita. I do not insist on your attending the English service here. I know it is very painful. Only I think it my duty to do so, however much Mr. Nilson's sermons may disgust me."

"But I cannot bear the idea of not going to church with you," Ita said, with tears in her eyes.

"I wish with all my heart we had never come here!" Edgar exclaimed. "I had a thousand times rather have lost my health, my sight, or even my life, than that you should lose faith in the Church of England!"

He looked so agitated, that wishing to soothe him she said, "But I did not say, I did not mean that I wished to leave it."

"Oh, no;" he cried, interrupting her. "I did not for an instant suppose you did. No, my own darling, my treasure, my precious wife, you could not, I know, harbour the deliberate thought of separating yourself from me in a way that would destroy all my happiness, ruin for me every prospect of usefulness, and even drive me from you. No, I am sure you could never dream of it; of all the forms of misery, it is the one I could not look in the face. No, all I meant was that it would pain me very much if, on account of my health, we had come to a place where, from casual circumstances, you may feel more deeply the existing trials in our Church, and contrast it unfavourably with the Roman communion. It is for that reason that, though I feel it myself a duty to attend the Anglican service, I do not press you to do so. Go if you like

on Sundays to one of the Roman Catholic churches, and pray that our Church may be delivered from its state of bondage; that it may fulfil its great mission, and still keep free from the errors and abuses of its sister Church."

"We can see about that when next Sunday comes," Ita said. She could not in fact bear the thought of the shadow of separation, which what Edgar had proposed seemed to throw on their future path. She felt that there would be no sense of duty to support her in it. If they belonged to the same religion they ought to go to the same church. Her place was by his side unless she clearly saw it should be elsewhere. On that day, and those that followed, a cold, dull heaviness took possession of her soul. Her apprehension of faith as a reality seemed to grow confused and dim. After all, she was too ignorant to decide what was right or wrong. Her duty to her husband was, of course, a plain and positive one, and come what might she would not make him unhappy. She would try not to take those religious questions so much to heart. It was not a woman's business to judge of controversial points. She summoned to her assistance all the sophistry with which weak, shrinking, human nature helps itself when it sees before it a terrible alternative. She succeeded for a while in silencing her doubts and misgivings. She paid visits to her friends, and carefully avoided all mention of religion. This was easy enough. They were not anxious to press it upon her. The pious ones among them thought praying for her would do more good than talking. Others did not take the trouble of thinking about it at all. She gave up all attempts to persuade them she and Edgar were Catholics, and ceased to ponder over that point herself. Her prayers were said in a hurried or formal manner. She did not feel inclined to read the Bible or spiritual books, be-

cause then the very subjects she wanted not to think of forced themselves on her mind. If she could but tide over the time abroad, all would be right again she hoped when she returned to England.

Edgar thought her rather capricious, because after having seemed at first to like so much going to the Catholic churches, she seemed now to object to it. Even on Christmas-day, and the ensuing festivals, it was somewhat reluctantly that she went with him in the afternoon to San Michele. She made no difficulty about going to the English service when he did, but everything connected with religion seemed at that time distasteful to her, and her spirits always rose when the Sunday was over, and mostly they rose when she was alone with her husband; when they spent whole days of sunshine and more than ordinary beauty in the valleys of Mentone or of Cabral, or in some quiet spot on the sea-shore. The cloud that then obscured for her divine truth, the vague uncertainty which dimmed her spiritual vision, made her cling to him with a yet deeper earthly worship. She had one of those hearts that are not in danger of selfishness. She bore meekly the mental trial she was undergoing. Now and then shaking off the heavy weight of discouragement, she made a fervent appeal to God's mercy for light; but even while the prayer was on her lips, her heart trembled lest the answer should come too distinctly and too soon.

CHAPTER VI.

EDGAR and Ita had not many visitors: he did not speak French or Italian easily, and this disinclined him to cultivate her Mentonese friends, and for particular reasons, he did not wish to see much of the Nilsons or of Mr. Neville; but he liked the latter, and they sometimes met him in their walks. Edgar asked him to dinner once or twice, and sometimes he paid them an evening visit; but since the day at Capo Martino, Edgar had carefully avoided all controversial conversation with him in Ita's presence. But one night when she had gone to bed early with a cold, and he happened to be alone when Mr. Neville called, he could not resist saying to him, "I hope you pray, as we do, for the ultimate union of our respective Churches?"

"I pray," he answered, "for the conversion of all the members of your Church; but as I do not consider it to be a Church, in the Catholic sense of the word, I cannot pray, in the way you do, for reunion."

"You assume, then, as a fact, what your own Church has always considered as an open question, that is the invalidity of Anglican orders?"

"The Holy See has formally denied the validity of Anglican orders by a decree of the Congregation of the Holy Office, confirmed by Pope Clement XI., and this decision is everywhere received and acted upon."

"But we do not, nor do many members of your own communion, accept a decision of that sort as

conclusive, that has not received the sanction of a General Council.

"The Church shows by her acts, which are in accordance with that decision, her estimate of the validity of Anglican orders. I require no other evidence. Nobody can deny that grave doubts exist as to the historical fact on which you found your belief in the validity of your orders."

"It appears to me to be established beyond dispute."

"But, supposing it to be so, it would not decide the Catholicity of the English Church. The question would still remain—Is this succession held in heresy or schism? The succession alone avails nothing for your argument."

"But it does avail, when, at the same time, we repel the charge of heresy and schism."

"But the Church of Rome considers you to be an heretical communion, and you cannot clear yourself of the guilt of schism, except by retorting the accusation. Either the Roman Catholic Church, or the so-called Church of England, must have grievously erred in matters of faith. How can it be otherwise? Who can read the Thirty-nine Articles and not see that either our Church or yours teaches what is false?"

"I deny that utterly. We agree as to all essential Catholic doctrines. As to the Articles, I should have thought that you must have been long ago aware that we do not consider them as Articles of faith, but simply of religion. When they seem to reflect on the Roman Church, they are, in reality, directed only against the Court of Rome. They are intended, and the homilies also, to meet special emergencies, and might easily be reconsidered when the question of reunion comes to be seriously contemplated; the more so as the Council of Trent has rectified the abuses against which they were directed."

"I know this is the way in which Anglicans defend their subscription of the Thirty-nine Articles, but I own I cannot understand how any dispassionate person, not interested in doing away with a difficulty fatal to the position Anglicans wish to maintain, and to the views they hold, could admit this as a tenable explanation."

"You look at the subject from your point of view, and see it, of course, in a different light from what we do."

"But I do not find it generally so difficult to conceive the mental position of those who differ from me. I can understand the reasoning of Protestants, of Unitarians, even to a certain degree the arguments of Infidels, but I own that the Anglican theory has always seemed to me so anomalous and inconsistent, that I cannot comprehend how it can satisfy an honest and logical mind. As a matter of fact, I do not think you would find any one, who was not interested in doing so, admitting, for instance, that a man can conscientiously sign the Thirty-nine Articles, and, at the same time, believe everything the Council of Trent sets forth."

"But I do not profess to do so."

"Ay! there is another difficulty. I met with one of your clergymen, a short time ago, who assurred me he did. There is such a variety of opinions, even amongst the members of your own party, that the argument which meets the case of one individual, does not apply to the next person you speak to."

"You implied, by what you said just now, that it is only from motives of interest that Anglicans defend the position of their Church. Is not this rather a rash judgment?"

"I did not mean merely temporal interests, but all those which touch their prejudices, affections, and pre-

dilections. I see, on the one hand, the Anglo-Catholic theory maintained by those to whom it is of the greatest importance to establish it. I see it admitted by no indifferent parties. And, moreover, I know that numbers of persons, during the last three hundred years, to whom it would have been the greatest advantage and relief to believe in it, have been unable to do so. At one time, English Roman Catholics would have saved their lives by accepting it; later, their properties and their political rights; and in our days we see Anglican clergymen reducing themselves, with their wives and their children, to the extremity of poverty, and losing their position in society—men and women foregoing the brightest prospects, and running the risk of banishment from home, and disinheritance, all which evils they could avoid by, as I say, accepting the theory of the Catholicity of the English Church. If it was obviously tenable, is it possible to conceive that they would not joyfully avail themselves of it."

"Suffering for the sake of a religious conviction is, in itself, no evidence of its truth. Though I have not more sympathy than you have for the French Huguenots and the Waldenses, we cannot deny that they went through great sufferings, rather than renounce their heresies."

"Yes; but thinking, as they did, there was no alternative for them but to give up their tenets, or suffer for them. Now, what I mean is, that a certain number of persons in the Church of England maintain a theory which saves them from suffering, and yet they say permits them to believe all Catholic doctrine, and follow all Catholic practices. If this theory was tenable, would English Roman Catholics, for three hundred years, have suffered in so many and various ways sooner than adopt it?"

"If anyone is unable to satisfy himself that the

English Church is Catholic, he must of necessity become a Romanist; but those who are convinced that she is a branch of the visible Church of Christ, are bound to remain in her Communion."

"Certainly; if they can really believe that their own opinion on that point, and that of a few more belonging to a particular scheme in the Anglican Church, is to be relied on in preference to that of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Church, the Protestant Dissenters, and the majority of the members of their own communion, all of which, while differing on other points, agree in considering Anglican pretensions to Catholicity as unfounded and preposterous."

"The fact of the revival of Catholic doctrines among us is itself an answer to your estimate of our position."

"I should say that the very expression, 'revival of Catholic doctrines,' on the contrary, confirms that estimate. You can revive in a Church piety and zeal; you can improve and elevate the morality of its clergy and laity, and cause stricter discipline to be observed; but when you speak of reviving forgotten doctrines, and of spreading them in a Church which, at the same time, you profess to regard as a teacher of truth, there is in this a contradiction of ideas which I do not see how you can get over. You are gradually getting your Church to teach you what you say she ought to teach; then, in what sense are you receiving her teaching? By your own acknowledgment you are Catholicising your Church, instead of your Church Catholicising you. Under these circumstances, how can she be said to be a teacher—how can she command submission, or speak with authority? Now, let me just put a case to you. Take a simple-minded person, willing to learn and to obey his spiritual pastors and masters as his Catechism tells him to do. He has no knowledge, no

preconceived opinions, but natural, plain, good sense. In despair of judging for himself, he resolves to accept the teaching of the Church of England, and submit to her guidance. Where shall he find it? He asks who are its exponents and its rulers. The answer is, of course, the Archbishops and Bishops. Well, with one or two exceptions, though differing about other things, they will tell him to eschew Puseyism. He asks who is the head of the Anglican Church. The Queen; her Majesty is a thorough Protestant—a great admirer of the German Reformers. What are its articles of religion? The Thirty-nine Articles; reading them as a plain, uninstructed man would do, he could not, in his honest simplicity, but think 'the Church of England may admit of some differences of opinion, but there is one thing quite clear: it is Protestant, and no Catholic can belong to it.' If he takes to reading history, will it confirm or destroy this impression? When has the Reformed Church of England, before the last few years, ever repudiated the name of Protestant? Have not Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer been called Protestant martyrs? Has it not made common cause with foreign Protestants, and has not its hatred of the Church of Rome, its bitter, unceasing animosity against it, been the prevailing spirit in it for three hundred years? And even now, though some of your High Church writers call it a sister Church, they cannot refrain from abuse and misrepresentation."

"And has not the Church of Rome," Edgar exclaimed, "been very hard upon us, bitterly unkind? We, the Catholics of the Church of England, who are fighting for the faith with its enemies at home, had some right to expect sympathy and encouragement from your Church, and we have met with neither one nor the other."

"If I was not afraid of saying what might seem

offensive," Edmund Neville said, "I would tell you openly what I think on that point."

"Say what you like."

"Well, I would put the case in this way. Let us suppose that, in feudal times, a great lord has been violently deprived of a portion of his dominions by one of his neighbours, who for twenty years has held it by main force, and governed it very badly according to the opinion of the original possessor. This usurping lord dies and leaves three sons, to whom the possession of the province devolves. One of these, with better natural dispositions than his brothers, dislikes their spirit and conduct, and would prefer that the country should be governed in the same way as it used to be under the rule of its former lord. He accordingly writes to him:—

"'My Lord,—I do not altogether approve of your acts in past times, and I should be unwilling to separate myself from my brothers much as I blame them, and detest the manner in which this province was taken from you; but I have been searching into old family documents, and I have not any doubt in my own mind—indeed, I am quite persuaded—that we are relatives of yours, though my brothers, indeed, do not acknowledge our common descent. I do not, therefore, under any circumstances, contemplate restoring to you this property, nor submitting to your government; but, if I can get the upper hand in the House, I fully intend, provided you agree to acknowledge us as your relatives, to adopt most of your ideas and principles, and perhaps even enter into a friendship with you.'

"I conceive that the original possessor's reply would be: 'If you detest the manner in which this property was taken from me, prove it by giving up your share of it. I do not see in the documents you

allude to any proof that you are related to me. On that point I agree with your brothers, and so do all our neighbours. I protest against your assumption of the fact, and against the claim you found upon it, and till you give it up, and address me as a subject to whose allegiance I have a right, no friendship can exist between us.' Would this letter be a hard and unkind one under the circumstances?"

"This may be very ingenious, Mr. Neville, but it is not a just parallel."

"Surely you must admit it to be just as far as the question goes of harshness and unkindness in the treatment of your claims by the Church of Rome, which utterly disallows them."

"You are too imaginative for me."

"Too logical," Mr. Neville thought, though he did not say so.

After a pause, Edgar said, "It is of no use to discuss this point with Romanists. There is a predetermination, an unavoidable one, indeed, in their case, not to admit our arguments or understand our position."

"But has not that position been abandoned by men who, so far from being predetermined on the subject, struggled with a sort of despair to keep their hold of it? Did not they surrender at last to what was repugnant and distasteful to them, leaving that which was dear and pleasing? Did not one powerful and subtle mind, in particular, exert its utmost ingenuity to find a mode of escape from the dreaded conclusion, and does not a famous piece of casuistry still appealed to by those who cling to the drifting bark he had vainly sought to guide into port, remain a monument of the ardent desire of the writer not to forsake the communion he had once hoped formed part of the Catholic Church? No, I cannot understand

you; I do not see how with your Prayer-book and your homilies, containing what they do, in your hands—with the testimony of history before you, the deaths of Fisher and More; the numbers of priests and laymen tortured and hanged in the days of persecution; the starving converts of the present day, those confessors whom infidels may sneer at, but whom you who believe in Christ and in a Church cannot despise—that you can think that this long series of protests against the Catholicity of the so-called Church of England was simply a mistake; that Sir Thomas More might have been as contented a *diocésain* of Cranmer or of Cromwell as you of Dr. Blomfield or Dr. Phillpotts; that Father Arrowsmith and Father Southwell, instead of dying at Tyburn, might have been Queen Elizabeth's bishops or priests, though she indeed with her shrewd, keen, clear-sightedness despised her own creations, and still have been as good, nay, according to your theory, better Catholics than as it was they proved themselves; and that the poor convert clergyman who entered a short time ago the walls of a workhouse with his wife and children, and another who has seen his wife die from the hardships of sudden poverty, have gone through all this misery gratuitously when they might perfectly well have been Catholic priests in the Established Church of England—dear Mr. Derwent, that you believe all this firmly, undoubtedly, unhesitatingly, is the hardest trial of my belief in your sincerity. But I do believe in it . . . . Yes, I know how difficult it is to see . . . . to admit . . . . I have no right to judge others . . . ."

Edgar was moved by the earnestness with which this was said. The thought crossed his mind that he was very glad Ita was not present. "This sort of thing might have an effect upon her," he thought. "It is plausible, but where would be our faith and our

trust if everything was clear and plain to us?" And he fell back on that fatal principle of patience—patience in error—patience as a refuge against conviction—patience as a sedative to the most reasonable misgivings. "Now," he said, gently, "you must let me have my say as I have let you have yours. In the first place I consider that the Reformation was in many respects as injurious to our Church as to yours. It brought about in it, indeed, in a violent manner, some of the beneficial changes which the Council of Trent effected on the Continent. It cleared away many abuses, but then it inflicted on us great and serious evils. The tyranny of the State took the place of Papal despotism; doctrines which it has never formally disowned were certainly obscured and thrown into the shade, still in the worst of times there have been among us witnesses to Catholic truth. A remarkable tradition has handed it down from generation to generation, like a thread of gold through a dark and coarse woof. We are the lineal descendants of the first British Christians. We can look back to the Church which the Apostles planted in our country, and to our own as descending from it in uninterrupted succession. There have been sad and dark pages in its history, but now light is again shining upon it and grace flows abundantly upon us through its ministrations."

"But if the present Church of England descends from any Church at all, it must be from the Anglo-Saxon Church founded by St. Augustine."

"I beg your pardon. The British Church had bishops recognized by the rest of Christendom long before St. Augustine came. Seven of them conferred with him when he arrived. He did not confer orders, he only founded new sees."

"But I need not remind you that there were in England at that time two distinct races—the British

and the Anglo-Saxon, the conquered and the conquerors. The British chiefly in and about Wales. The seven bishops Augustine conferred with belonged to the conquered race. It was on the borders of Wales that the conference took place. He entreated them to help him to convert their Saxon conquerors. They absolutely refused, and he prophesied their destruction. They had nothing whatsoever to do with the Anglo-Saxon Church, of which he was the Apostle and Metropolitan at Canterbury—the Church of Edward the Confessor, of St. Thomas à Becket, of Sir Thomas More. If these men were to return to life, could you for a moment suppose that they would side with the Anglican and not with the Roman Catholic Church in England?"

"I think those sort of suppositions irrelevant and captious. We cannot at this distance of time judge how the minds of men of former ages would be affected by the present state of things amongst us. If you find it so difficult to admit the Catholicity of the Church of England . . . ."

"Not difficult but impossible."

"Well, if you find it so impossible, I find it impossible also to believe in the divine authority of Popes, many of whom were elected through the undue influence of emperors, women even, and lawless nobles who prevailed on the cardinals to raise unworthy persons to the Papal chair."

"Well, suppose the facts to be as you state them, which I am not preared to admit, but for argument sake granting they were, what would it prove? Only that the cardinals sinned. If they made a true election, the man they elected, though he were a bad man, would still be really and truly Bishop of Rome and Pope; a true high priest as Caiaphas was, who, because he was the high priest, uttered a true prophecy.

He would be in the position of the Scribes and Pharisees of whom our Lord said, 'All things whatsoever they shall say to you observe and do, but according to their works do ye not.' If a bad man was elected Pope after Pius IX., we should be very sorry, but we should obey him, for we believe firmly in the promises of Christ, and that even if a bad man were elected Pope he would be prevented by the Holy Spirit from teaching error, just as the Jewish priests, though bad men, told the truth to the wise men; as Pilate was compelled to place the true inscription on the Cross; as Balaam was compelled to utter a blessing and not a curse. If you reject the papacy because some popes were bad you say, you ought to reject the College of Apostles because Judas once belonged to it."

"But how can you believe that the Holy Spirit guides all the Popes to teach truth when it is well known that some of them have condemned the acts and denied the titles of their predecessors?"

"Can you tell me what Popes you allude to? What acts? What titles? What predecessors?"

"I cannot trust to my memory on the subject, and I have not books here to refer to; but I am certain that such instances occur in history."

"If you had adduced the facts, we could examine each on its own merits. As it is, I must answer in another way. Now what follows from the fact that a Pope condemns the act of his predecessor? The answer to that question depends on the nature of the act condemned. If, for instance, a Pope said, 'I think my predecessor acted too severely in such and such a case, or yielded too much to Napoleon the First, or was in too great a hurry to restore the English hierarchy;' such condemnations as these would prove nothing. We are not required to believe that every act of a Pope is the best thing he could have done."

"But what becomes, then, of the Papal infallibility?"

"If one Pope was to condemn a doctrine taught by his predecessor; if the Popes were to contradict one another on matters of doctrine as your bishops do, then it would certainly result that they could not be infallible. At the same time it would not prove that they are not the supreme authority in the government of the Church. There are Catholics who hold that the Pope may err even in doctrine, but that the Church in council cannot; but they do not on that account deny the Papal supremacy in government. If you can prove that one Pope has condemned the doctrine of another, it would show that a Council is wanted to decide doctrines; but it does not show at all that the Pope is not the head of the Church. We maintain that he is appointed by our Lord as its supreme pastor and ruler. Both the sheep and the lambs were committed to St. Peter's care. Every bishop and priest must submit to one authority in order that the Church may be one in government. But, mind you, I do not believe that you can show by history a single instance in which a Pope has condemned a doctrine really taught by his predecessor."

"I am certain such instances exist."

"It is difficult to carry on this sort of discussion without books to refer to; but there is another point that must be taken into consideration. There have been, at different times, pretenders to the Papacy, many of whom were not really Popes at all, though they took the name. It might, therefore, very well happen that a Pope might condemn the acts and title of his predecessors—that is to say, of men who had taken the title, but were not popes at all."

The conversation was at that moment interrupted by the sound of a knock at the door. The instant

afterwards a servant came in to say Mr. Nilson had called, and wished to speak to Mr Derwent. Nothing could be less agreeable to Edgar than to receive this visit just then. He did not like to introduce Mr. Neville to his brother clergyman, or Mr. Nilson to him; but there was no help for it. The room was rather dark, and Edmund's Roman collar was concealed by a comforter he had forgotten to take off, the visitor did not recognize in him the Romish priest he had sometimes met in the streets.

Mr. Nilson had been seized with a sudden hoarseness which prevented him from raising his voice above a whisper.

"You see," he said, sitting down in the arm-chair Edgar had placed for him, "that I am quite incapacitated for to-morrow's duties. May I hope, dear sir, that you will have the kindness to read the service and preach for me?"

An imperceptible smile hovered on Mr. Neville's lips. What a singular idea of duty it seemed, that two men, each fully convinced that the other held dangerous errors, should think it right to undertake by turns the instruction of their fellow-Christians. Edgar did not at all like the idea of officiating in what he had sometimes petulantly called Mr. Nilson's conventicle; but when it came to the point, he did not quite see how he could refuse. Anglican scruples are very apt to vanish at the touch of realities. It has been, for instance, sometimes intimated to Dissenters not to expect to receive the Sacrament at a high Anglican altar, and then a relative or friend who chances to be a Presbyterian, or an Irvingite, may happen to be staying with the clergyman, and the duty of excluding heretics from Communion does not seem stringent enough to weigh against the fear of a family quarrel, or the amiable dread of giving pain to a loved friend,

by the pointed manifestation of Church principles. It would have been unkind to refuse Mr. Nilson's request, and difficult, especially before Mr. Neville, to enter into the subject of their religious differences. Besides, as he had gone to his chapel for the service, he could not well allege any good reason for refusing to do the duty. So he said he would do what he was asked, and was warmly thanked for his assent. Mr. Nilson then said, "It is very fortunate indeed for my little flock that you should have happened to be here just now, Mr. Derwent. They are most of them pious Christians who would greatly miss the privilege of public worship on the Sabbath-day, and I should have particularly regretted the necessity of closing the chapel to-morrow, as I have reason to hope that three or four women, natives of this place, and a very superior young man, whom I hope, when he is converted, may become a Scripture-reader, will attend the service."

Mr. Neville bit his lip, and Edgar coloured.

"They are really very interesting inquirers. One of the women, though she cannot read, accepted a Bible. She said she supposed it would do her some good; and though this may be a somewhat superstitious idea, there is something pleasing in it. When we have an Italian Scripture-reader he can read and expound to her the Holy Scriptures."

Edgar devoutly wished Mr. Nilson had not almost, but entirely, lost his voice, and said, in a quick manner, "I cannot think it can be right to perplex the minds and disturb the faith of these poor people. I am told they are good and pious, innocent and ignorant . . . ."

"Ay!" groaned Mr. Nilson, "utterly ignorant of Gospel truths. Worshippers of the Madonna!"

"Not so ignorant as to religion, I suspect," Edgar

replied, "as some of our own poor people. From what I hear, you would not easily find among these poor peasants persons who had never heard of God and Jesus Christ, unbaptized children, and baptized men and women dying like dogs without a thought of God, and of eternity. I am not a Romanist . . . ."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mr. Nilson.

"But I should shudder at the thought of shaking the faith of a poor Roman Catholic who belongs to the Church of Christ, and believes everything necessary to salvation. I should think it a sin for which I should be called to account on the day of judgment."

Mr. Nilson looked aghast. "But, my dear sir, is it no object to make these poor souls acquainted with the saving truths of the Gospel? To show them the way of salvation? To place the Bible before their blind eyes . . . ."

"If they are blind how are they to read?" Mr. Neville murmured.

Edgar heard him, but not Mr. Nilson, who was rather deaf, as well as hoarse.

"My dear Mr. Derwent," he continued, "If Papists are not in a very dangerous state, then we have no business to be Protestants. Then the glorious Reformation was a sin, and the immortal Luther an enemy, instead of a benefactor, of mankind; and we had better return again as fast as we can to the Church of Rome. But I say she is idolatrous, and wicked in her principles, though God forbid I should say so of all her members, who are better than their doctrines; but we must try and snatch as many souls as we can from her bondage, and restore them to the blessed freedom of the Gospel. She keeps the Bible from the laity—she will not allow the Scriptures to be read. It was only the other day that one of the priests here

wanted to take away a Bible I had given him from the young man I was speaking of just now. . . . ."

"A convert to your Church?" Mr. Neville asked.

"Yes, he is about to abjure the errors of Rome, and to marry an English young lady, who would never have accepted a Papist for her husband."

"A satisfactory conversion!" Edgar remarked, in a low voice.

"We are about to establish a central depôt of Bibles on this coast, and to organize a general system for evangelizing the inhabitants of the towns and the villages. We hope to receive large subscriptions from England for this purpose, and the various Bible Societies promise to aid us. I am happy to say that we have already made some progress, though not so great as we could wish. The people are so bigoted and the influence of the priests still so great. Very few of them will declare themselves Protestants, and actually join our pure and holy Church; but I have noticed if not here, at least in some other places, satisfactory symptoms. Some of those who have accepted our Bibles and tracts, and the little charitable assistance we can give them, have begun to eat meat on Fridays, and declare they do not care for what the priests say. And on the day of the Corpus Christi procession at Bosco Nero, some of them were actually standing with their hats on when the Host was carried by. This was a great comfort to me. It seemed a proof that Protestant truth is beginning to make its way into these beautiful regions by means of the gospel teaching of our dear Reformed Church. It was very consoling indeed."

At this point Mr. Nilson's voice fairly broke down.

He had gasped out the last words with a strangling energy which exhausted its small power.

Edgar's eyes met those of the Catholic priest, and

with heightened colour, and in an excited manner he exclaimed, "All I can say is, that I utterly reject your views of the teachings of our Church. I entirely disagree with your opinions, and abhor the disrespect to the Blessed Sacrament which you speak of. What you call gospel truth I consider as downright heresy, and I deny that our Church teaches it."

Mr. Nilson, making an effort to recover his voice, murmured, "And you call yourself a Protestant clergyman!"

"I do not call myself any such thing."

"Good heavens! Mr. Derwent!"

"I consider that those who speak and act as you do, are the worst enemies of our Church. I beg your pardon. Excuse me. I did not mean to speak so strongly. Forgive me."

Such an expression of pain had passed over the face of the older clergyman, so unmixed with resentment, so sad and so perplexed, that Edgar felt remorse at the violence with which he had expressed himself. Mr. Nilson sighed deeply and said, "Alas! what will be the fate of our Reformed Church, for three hundred years the stronghold and bulwark of Protestantism, when her own ministers can use such language. My dear friend! you still have the Bible in your hands; you read it, I am sure, every day with prayer; while that is the case you cannot long be seduced by dangerous errors. That is my hope and my reliance."

Mr. Neville then said in a voice which this time reached Mr. Nilson's ear, "Is it your belief, my dear sir, that if any one reads the Bible every day with a true and earnest desire to know and do God's will, that he will be guided into all truth?"

Mr. Nilson rather suspected that the person who was addressing him was a Catholic, and the thought crossed his mind, "Perhaps my words have struck

him. He might be disposed to accept a Bible. I wish I had brought one with me." However, he answered, "I have not the slightest doubt of it. Only try, my dear friend, and after a while the truths of the gospel will be made clear to you; you will feel an asssurance of salvation, and your soul will pass from darkness into light."

Mr. Neville answered, "For more than a year I studied the Bible every day, beseeching God with prayers and with tears to make His truth and His will known to me. The more I read and the more I prayed the more I became convinced that there is but one Church appointed by Him to teach truth with authority to men, and that is the Roman Catholic Church. I abjured Protestantism, became a Catholic, and in course of time a priest. I have continued to read the Bible every day, and I have found day by day my faith strengthened, and my reason more and more convinced. I look back on the past and compare it with the present, and if I would I could no longer doubt. The Bible has done this for me. It has done so for thousands in our own day and our own land. I would fain add, may it do so for you both, who, like knights disputing by the two-faced shield, are ministers of a two-faced Church, which you appeal to with equal right and equal hopelessness."

"But the Bible," shrieked out Mr. Nilson, "the Bible cannot teach Roman Catholicism. It teaches Protestantism!"

Mr. Neville could not help smiling. "It has taught me Catholicism. It teaches you Calvinism. It teaches Mr. Derwent Anglicanism. It teaches us all charity, I hope, and with that hope I will wish you good-night. Do not, I beg of you, come out into the cold."

When the two clergymen were left together, one of them thought, "It is these Evangelicals who drive

people out of our Church;" and the other, "It is those Puseyites who lure our people to Rome."

"I must go home too," Mr. Nilson said, "it is getting late, I am really very much obliged to you about the duty to-morrow; I suppose . . . . that you will not touch in your sermon on anything extreme?"

"No," Edgar answered, "but if any of your neophytes are present, I do not know how I can refrain from advising them not to be in a hurry to forsake their Church."

"You do not mean that you would stop the work of grace?"

"Oh no, not any work of grace," Edgar impatiently answered. "But, indeed, as I presume they do not understand English, it cannot much signify as far as they are concerned, what I say or do not say. What good do you think it can do those people to come and sit by whilst the English Service is read? Surely those who blame the Church of Rome for using an unknown tongue, should not encourage such an attendance as this in our Church."

"It accustoms them to stay away from Mass," Mr. Nilson answered, "and soon we hope to have an Italian Service for them."

When the door had closed on his brother clergyman, Edgar walked up and down the room trying to quiet his mind with the oft-repeated words—"In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength."

They might as well serve a man clinging to a sinking ship, and refusing to be rescued.

CHAPTER VII.

At eleven o'clock that same evening Edgar was writing, in his dressing-room, his sermon for the next day. He stopped short in the middle of his task, and looked into his wife's room. Seeing she was not asleep, he walked in, pen in hand. "It is dreadful," he said, "to be obliged to preach for that man, and in that wretched, conventicle-looking place."

"Then why do so, dearest?" Ita answered; as he sat down by her bed-side.

"We must do our duty when it is difficult and disagreeable as well as when it is easy and pleasant. Everything of the kind was full of satisfaction and pleasure at home. Here it is distasteful to the highest degree. But we must not deprive others of public worship to spare our own feelings."

"No; if it is clear that you ought to officiate in Mr. Nilson's chapel, then, of course, you must. But I am glad I happen to have this cold just now, and shall like much better to read the Service at home, and the beautiful lines in the 'Christian Year' for this week, than to go to church to-morrow. By the way, you will have to look out for the least objectionable hymns in that horrid green book. Oh, darling Edgar, I do not at all like the idea of your preaching for Mr. Nilson, who says such dreadful things of Catholics. It is so difficult to me to think it can be right. It unsettles every notion of truth and falsehood; and, surely, if we ought to be true about anything, it is reli-

gion. Anglicanism is such a makeshift," she suddenly exclaimed, with a sort of desperation; "it is such a system of expedients to prove to ourselves and others that we are what nobody thinks us, and to make words express what they do not mean. Oh, Edgar, God cannot want this! Forgive me, but I felt as if I should suffocate if I did not speak out."

Edgar had turned pale, and looked sternly at his wife. He felt for the first time, and with the keenest pain, how much her confidence in the Church of England had been shaken since she had been abroad; how little she had been able to resist what he called the fascinations of Roman Catholicism, and maintain her Church principles when they happened not to be fully carried out before her eyes. His fears were aroused, his feelings hurt, his iron will arrayed on the side of what he considered to be right. She had never spoken so plainly before, or expressed so openly what he could not bear to hear. He would speak plainly, also, half from a sense of duty, half from indignant passion. He had never before realized the possibility that his wife could ever take a different line from him about religion. Now it flashed upon him that other women had done so—women as gentle and submissive as Ita in all things else had been rebellious on this one point; and he resolved she should not go blindly forward in a fatal course—that she should know, before it was too late, what misery it would bring upon them both.

He took her hand in his, and said, slowly, fixing his eyes upon her with an intensity which made her close her own, "Ita, my own darling Ita, my beloved wife, I have and do love you more tenderly, more ardently, than I have, perhaps, ever shown or expressed—more so, perhaps, than is right in one who has sworn to serve at God's altar. Because I loved you so much. . . ." He stopped, and his voice faltered. He thought of

Annie, generous, devoted Annie, and of his faithlessness to her, but did not give utterance to that thought. He recovered himself, and did not finish his sentence. He did not tell Ita that for her sake he had suffered something very like remorse, but said, "No; I think it is impossible for any man to have loved a woman more intensely than I have loved you, and yet, if you were ever to forsake the Church of England, to deny by that act her Catholicity, to side with her scornful enemies, to turn publicly against me, and to proclaim to the world your belief that my orders are invalid, my ministrations void, my life a delusion, and my office a sham, then there would be an end to all our domestic happiness, and we should part. I cannot understand how an Anglican priest can keep by his side, in his house, and in his parish, a witness against his faith and his Church. I would rather beg my bread with you than live in splendour without you. I would rather leave Holmwood for ever than separate from you; but my vows of fidelity to the Church of my baptism preceded my marriage vows, and as I said, on a day which severed my fate from hers, who loved me well, though unrequitedly, 'He is no Christian who is not ready to cut off his hand or pluck out his eye rather than act against his conscience.' I should tear out my heart from my breast by parting with you, the darling and treasure of my life; but I would do so in that terrible case—yes, even if these eyes were to weep themselves blind after thrusting you from me."

He knelt down by the side of the bed, and hid his face on the counterpane. Poor Ita looked on that beloved head; she laid her cold, nervous little hand on the thick brown hair she was so fond of. She thought of those eyes, which the least ray of light hurt, which tears would fatally injure—of Annie and Holmwood abandoned for her sake, for her, the nameless child

that had crossed his path and spoiled his destiny. She looked up to heaven with a mute appeal, an intense longing for a sign from the great, powerful, invisible, silent Lord of Creation and Redemption. She sent up that cry for light which so many utter in these days from the depths of an agonizing perplexity.

The time was not yet come when that prayer was to receive its answer. She turned again her eyes towards her husband, and, as she bent over him, murmured, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!" She, too, sought to still the voice of the charmer by a text of Scripture. Edgar looked up into her face. She threw her arms round his neck and sobbed on his shoulder. "Never, never can I leave you," she cried. "What you believe I must believe; what you hope I must hope, even against hope; where you are I must be, in life and in death. Who am I that I should dare to separate myself from you, who first led me to God and are a thousand times nearer to Him than I am?" Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling. She was clinging to him as if the idea of separation stood like a spectre by their side, ready to thrust itself between their two hearts, which were then beating close to each other. "Shall I promise you," she suddenly exclaimed, "never to be a Roman Catholic?"

Edgar started. He saw there was something like desperation in her manner; he shrunk from accepting from her this promise. "No, darling," he said, tenderly kissing her forehead, "no, do not make any promises; but I now feel sure you never will be one. You would not break my heart, and throw a dark shade over the whole of my life? Drive away, banish such a thought as a dreadful temptation. To use your own misapplied words, my own wife, 'This cannot be what God wants.'"

She kissed his hand over and over again before he left her to finish his sermon. She resolved when he was gone never to leave the Church of England. She said to herself, as her head fell back on the pillow, "No, God does not want it of me." And yet Edgar's own words were haunting her all the time. The hand cut off, the eye plucked out, the heart torn from the bosom, rather than not obey the voice of conscience. But what did conscience command?

This, this is the question, the harassing doubt, the terrible uncertainty which distracts so many souls in Ita's position. God answers it in His own day, in His own hour—sometimes by a still, soft voice, heard in silent prayer; sometimes by the slow, gradual clearing away of doubts, like that of a mist on the morning of a sunny day; sometimes by a sudden burst of light, flooding the astonished soul; sometimes in grief, sometimes in joy; sometimes by words like those St. Paul heard on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Sometimes by the simple "Follow Me," addressed to the fishermen and the publican. It comes at last, that answer, when the struggle is perhaps at its height, and despair seems at hand; when the mind is weary with thinking; when to pray is too great an effort; when we are about to murmur, and to say to God what He said to Saul, "Why persecutest Thou me?" Then, one day, His Divine hand beckons us on. The suffering has not ceased, the doubts seem scarcely to have vanished, but the struggle is ended. We cannot go back. We see behind us nothing real, consistent, and true. Before us what is there? We hardly know; but we have a strong hope, almost a faith, that beyond the veil which hides from us the unseen there lies a whole world of peace and strength; and we press on, though we feel it to be a venture.

"Oh, my God! I thank Thee that I made that venture!" * * * * *

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About a fortnight or three weeks after this conversation, in the early days of February, which had brought with it cloudless skies and soft air, Edgar proposed to make an excursion along the coast as far as San Remo. Ita was delighted with the idea. To be alone with her husband was, more than ever, what she enjoyed. The interruptions to their solitude at the villa had not, indeed, been frequent, but both of them now rather dreaded visits, whether from Edmund Neville or Mr. and Mrs. Nilson. The former did not press any controversy upon them; but there is always some little embarrassment in seeing much of a person whose mind is occupied with the same subjects as our own, and yet those subjects are on both sides avoided. It is often easier to carry on an ordinary intimacy when there is a total absence of sympathy, than where a constant temptation occurs to broach subjects of common interest, but bordering on dangerous ground.

Ita also liked the thoughts of spending a Sunday at San Remo, which was then quite uninvaded by strangers. She and Edgar would go to no church, but read the Service together on the sea-shore, or in a shady spot in the woods. During a whole week she should talk only with him; hear hardly any voice but his. They would be out of doors all day. It would be like a second honeymoon. She was unconsciously making her love for her husband her religion, and the grey olive-groves, with the blue vault of heaven for its dome, was the fittest temple for that worship.

There was, however, another consideration that made her eagerly look forward to this little journey. They would pass through Spedaletti, the sea-coast village where she had spent her infancy. She had not

ventured to speak to Edgar of her wish to go there. She did not feel sure he would like it. He was always kind when she alluded to the pecularity of her fate, but it was not a subject he was inclined to dwell upon, and her sensitive consciousness of this reluctance had prevented her from expressing her desire to visit that spot. Now, however, it would come about in a natural manner, and she prepared with great eagerness for the excursion. Edgar was to walk and she to ride on a donkey. They were to take nobody with them, but a boy. A carpet-bag and a light box held all their baggage. They intended to sleep the first night at Ventimiglia, the second at Bordighiera, the third at San Remo.

When they set out the weather had been perfectly settled for some days. Everything was bright and lovely as sunshine and spring could make it, for February when it is fine is spring on that coast. The almond-trees were already covered with their pink blossoms which mingle beautifully with the silvery foliage of the olives. All was charming except the dust which, when a diligence or voiture passed them, rose in a dense cloud of white powder. Sometimes they avoided the highroad, and followed a track along the hills, or went for a little while along the sea-shore.

At noon on the first day they stopped to rest the donkey and themselves, and to eat their luncheon under an ilex-tree in a gorge at the entrance of a valley. Ita took a childish pleasure in filling their gourds with water trickling from a rock. She was in the greatest spirits.

"I wonder," she said, "if it is selfish to like to have you all to myself; I want nobody else, not even the greatest friends." After a pause, she added: "How strangely intense enjoyment borders on pain. It makes me understand . . . ." She stopped short,

it was what Mr. Neville had said about Purgatory that she was thinking of; "pain more intense than any earthly pain, yet joy at the same time." But she was afraid of disturbing the perfect bliss of that sunshiny hour by the mention of anything in which Edgar and her might not agree.

He smiled at her remark, and said, "How little Annie would enter into that feeling of yours!"

Ita laughed. "I can fancy her large eyes opening wide with that surprised look they have when I indulge in flights of fancy. What a dear kind letter that was we had from her last week, full of the news of home. It was so nice of her to tell us she had taken care to send plenty of flowers from the hothouse every Sunday for the altar, and that the children sang, 'Come, faithful, approach ye,' still better than last year. There was only one thing I wish she had not said."

"What was that?" Edgar asked, as he leant back against the tree, with his eyes half closed.

"That she had heard a very painful report, but would not mention it till she was quite certain of its truth. What was the use, in that case, of speaking of it at all? I cannot bear people *hinting* at news whether good or bad?"

"*Curiosity*, thy name is woman," Edgar said, laughing.

Meanwhile a troop of little ragged children had gathered round Ita, and were gazing with wistful eyes on the contents of her basket. The donkey-boy, who had already had his own dinner out of it, told them to go away, but she exclaimed:

"Oh, no; let us give them the sandwiches. We must keep the biscuits to fall back upon if we are starved on the way; but they can have these," and she distributed the contents of a paper bag amongst the wild little urchins, who in return gave her bunches

of violets, periwinkles, and pink anemones. She asked them some questions, but their answers were incomprehensible. They spoke the patois of the Riviera, which is different from the Mentone dialect.

"We must resume our march," Edgar announced.

"Do ride the donkey for a while," she said, "and let me walk."

"Oh, dear no! little woman!" he answered, lifting her on the saddle. "I am not at all tired," and they went on, Edgar humming the old French Revolutionary song—

"En avant, marchons
Contre leurs canons,
A travers le fer, le feu des bataillons,
Courons à la victoire!"

"I like still better than that," Ita said, "the Hymn of the Girondins. The refrain is so fine—

'Mourir pour la patrie,
C'est le sort le plus beau,
Le plus digne d'envie.'

"A false sentiment," Edgar remarked.

"You mean that to die for one's faith is more glorious?"

"Of course; who could compare the two?"

"Did you ever read Polyeucte?" Ita inquired.

"No; I could never endure French tragedies."

"Oh, I like some of Corneille's. Pauline in 'Les Martyrs' asks her lover, who is going to die because he is a Christian, if he loves her (she is a heathen, you know), and he answers—

'Beaucoup moins que mon Dieu, mais bien plus que moi-même.'

"I like the idea, but I cannot say I care for the line."

"I wonder how one could have borne what people went through in the days of persecution."

"We need not speak of them in the past tense. In the Roman Catholic annals of the Propagation of the Faith, there are frequent accounts of the most dreadful martyrdoms in heathen countries. And I suppose the Catholics in Poland endure, at the hands of the Russian Government, the severest sufferings, moral and physical."

"It frightens me to think how ill I bear a toothache. How should I endure the rack?"

"I think what Mr. Neville was saying the other day is true, that God gives us strength to bear the trials He sends us, but not those we go through in imagination. When you think of martyrdom it is with the amount of courage you are naturally gifted with . . . ."

"And that is the smallest amount possible," she interrupted, with a smile. "I am not sure that I am not afraid of that hungry-looking dog, who is barking at us from the top of the cliff."

"Exactly so. Perhaps St. Agnes and St. Anastasia might have also been frightened at a yelping cur. When the trial comes, then the gift of strength comes, if we have faith."

"Ah, then, a toothache without a special grace to bear it may be worse than the thumb-screw with that grace. As St. Theresa said, when she was going to found a convent with eightpence, 'Theresa and eightpence are very little, but Theresa, eightpence, and Almighty God are a great deal.'"

"I did not know that you had been reading St. Theresa's works."

"Yes, Mrs. Sydney lent them to me the last time we were at Grantley Manor. She must have been, I think, the most charming person in the world, besides a great saint. Do you not wish? . . . ." Here the pathway became so narrow that Edgar could not keep

by the side of the donkey, and Ita was left to her own thoughts. She was struck by what her husband had said about grace being given to us in proportion to present trials, and not to those we look forward to. Perhaps, then, we ought never to think that any effort or sacrifice would be too great for our strength. Not even . . . ." There she felt it necessary to check the direction that thought was taking. It was better not to follow it up. The words "Mourir pour la patrie" kept, however, running in her mind. How strongly Edgar had spoken about dying for one's faith. How much more, then, ought one to suffer for it! That, too, was a dangerous subject of meditation, so, to divert her mind from it, she talked to Dominico, who kept in front of the donkey

"Is your mother still alive?" she asked him.

"Yes, Signora, thanks to the Madonna di Lagheto. She went there last Trinity Sunday, and recovered the use of her limbs. Her crutches were left at the altar of the Madonna."

"Do people go there as much as ever?"

"Indeed, I should think they did, Signora. More than ever, I assure you."

"I remember one year that we stayed late in the summer at Mentone, seeing carts full of sick people with their friends on their way to Lagheto."

"To be sure, Signora, and no wonder, seeing what great *grazzias* are obtained there. My mother's hip-joint was diseased for many years. She had been to see doctors at Nice, but they all said it was a hopeless case; that she would never be better. *Poverina*, she cried a whole day after they had told her so. But my aunt, who is a holy woman, always praying, said, 'If I was you, Marina, I would go to Lagheto,' and my father hired a cart, and took her there himself. There was an immense crowd, so many carts and tents all

round the convent that they could hardly get near enough for her to hobble to the church on crutches They had to carry her at last, and hoist her over the heads of the crowd to bring her near the Madonna's altar. After she had said a prayer, she felt a strange pain in all her limbs, as if something had happened to her. This was the *grazzia*, Signora. She left her crutches behind, and walked back all the way home. She has been quite well ever since, and is almost as great a saint now as my aunt. We shall all go to Lagheto at the Trinity this year to thank the Madonna."

"People go there from a great distance?"

"To be sure they do. From Alassio and Savona, and even from Genoa, and from the mountains, too, in great numbers. They have done so for hundreds of years and will do so, I think, till the day of Judgment. The Madonna is so good,"

"What is that about the Madonna?" Edgar asked, as they all turned again from the pathway into the highroad.

Ita repeated to him in English what Dominico had said. He shook his head. "Always the Madonna."

"But, Edgar, if our Lord chooses to work miracles at his Mother's request, why should you object to it?"

"*If* He does, but does He? That is the question."

"I cannot help believing He does, for would it not be most extraordinary that for hundreds of years thousands and thousands of persons, at great trouble and inconvenience to themselves, should travel long distances, carrying sick people with them to a particular place, in order to obtain a miraculous cure, when no such miraculous cures were ever obtained? It would be such a strange delusion."

"Strange, indeed, but unfortnnately there is a grea

tendency in ignorant persons to entertain this sort of delusions."

"But, dearest Edgar, why do you smile in that kind of pitying, scornful way?"

"My darling, I really find it difficult to discuss this question seriously. It is so absurd. These are exactly the sort of things that are so objectionable in Roman Catholicism. The priests encourage the people in these superstitions."

"But now, just listen to me, dearest. Why is it superstitious in these people to believe that when they go with faith and ask of God to cure themselves or their friends . . . ."

"Not God, the Madonna."

"But, dear Edgar, you know they believe that it is only by God's power at the Madonna's request that they are cured." She turned to Dominico, and asked him in Mentonese—"Could the Blessed Virgin have cured your mother without the help of her Divine Son?"

"Certainly not, Signora; but what she asks Him to do He never refuses."

"He says just what I said, Edgar; and I want you just to tell me why is it now absurd to think that miracles take place, when it is right to believe they happened some hundred years ago?"

"There is not the same occasion for them now?"

"Well, dearest, it seems to me that there is great occasion for them now, when there are so many infidels and unbelievers. And how can we judge if they are necessary or not? How can we decide about that? The Roman Catholics say they have never ceased in the Church."

"A belief in modern miracles is not an article of faith with them."

"No, but they all, most of them at least, think they

do happen sometimes now. But whether they do take place or not, what is there absurd in believing they do? The early Christians used to cure sick people with handkerchiefs the apostles had touched, and laid them in the streets that the shadow of St. Peter might fall upon them."

"St. Peter was an apostle."

"But if the shadow of an apostle could work a miracle, why not the image of God's mother? or why not the relics of His saints?"

"I remember a discussion on that question some years ago at Holmwood. I think Mr. Hendon took your side of the argument."

"That is what he would be sure to do. He says, it puts him out of all patience to hear people who say they believe every word of the Bible, all the miracles in the Old and New Testament—the story about Balaam's ass speaking, for instance, and then laugh at Roman Catholics for saying that miracles sometimes happen now. It is so inconsistent. If God could work wonders two thousand years ago, why is it ridiculous to think He does so now? Please, Edgar, please, tell me that you see some truth in what I say?"

Edgar smiled. "Well, Pussy, I will admit the possibility, though I cannot believe in all these modern miracles."

"Oh, I dare say there are often mistakes about them, but I am glad you admit they are possible."

They had by this time arrived near Ventimiglia—the old castellated towers frowned upon them from their picturesque heights, and there they spent the night at a very poor osteria, and were obliged to have recourse to Ita's biscuits, their evening meal having proved anything but satisfactory.

The day's journey from Ventimiglia to Bordighiera

was not so pleasant as the preceding one. The sun was hotter and the wind colder, the dust more constantly annoying, and the deviations from the highroad seldom practicable. Edgar looked weary, but nothing would induce him to ride the donkey, or to own he was tired. Ita was much occupied with the idea that on the morrow they would pass through Spedaletti. She had not yet mentioned to her husband her wish to halt there, and to stroll about the place in search of old recollections. She did not think he would understand her wishing it so much. Yet nobody cared more for old associations than he did. Nobody was more attached than he was to particular places. But it did not follow that he would sympathize with her feelings of the sort; he was not selfish, for the moment he saw that an action was right or kind, he would never omit to perform it, but he did not easily conceive that what did not interest him could interest others. Ita, from the first moment of their acquaintance, had entered so fully into everything that was of importance and pleasure to him, that he had never realized that she could have desires and inclinations apart from his. The strongest love does not always insure that sympathy will be shown when the person who feels it has what is called in French *un caractère entier*, which does not mean either a proud, or a selfish, or a self-sufficient one, in the bad sense of the word, but implies a self-concentration that makes everything circle round itself, and fancies it sympathizes with others when it merely accepts their sympathy. Ita had, on the other hand, one of those natures which recoil, from a cold look or word as others would from a blow, and though very impulsive she was also reserved from an instinctive dread of the pain which anything like a repulse gave her. She felt that Edgar would not care about the faint reminiscences of the days of her infancy, and at

one moment she almost resolved to ride through Spedaletti without alluding to them.

In the evening, however, as they were walking in the garden just outside the town, a famous one for its fine palm-trees, she took courage, and said—

"I should like so much to stop to-morrow at Spedaletti, and walk about a little there. It is the place where I lived before Lady Emily adopted me."

"Do we go through it?" Edgar asked. "I fancied it was on the other side of San Remo. Certainly, we can stop there if you wish it. Have you been there since your infancy?"

"We passed through it twice on our way to Genoa, but as Lady Emily never spoke of the time before I lived with her, I did not venture to say anything about it."

"But what do you want to do there? You cannot remember anybody, I suppose? Those old people who took care of you are dead, you told me."

"Yes; but I want to look at the cottage I lived in, and perhaps I could make some of the people recollect my being there."

"And what will be the use of that, my darling?"

"I do not suppose it will be of any use," she answered, pressing his arm against her heart, "but it will be one of those strange pleasures we can hardly account for."

"Then by all means we will stop there; but I think it very likely you will see nothing as you remember it. Childish recollections are so confused."

They went to rest early, after enjoying a pink sunset and a rising moon, which illumined with its silvery light the low flat shore, and the fancied forms of the feathery palm-trees. Nothing could be more primitive than the accommodation to be found at that time in the little towns on the Corniche road. The

food was insufficient and bad—the beds hard—the pillows like stones, the odours unpoetical; but they were neither of them fastidious, and nothing of that sort destroyed their enjoyment.

The next day, Ita awoke full of excitement, her heart beating at the prospect of the halt they were to make at Spedaletti. She could hardly think of anything else.

"How dreamy you are this morning," Edgar remarked, when he had been twice obliged to call her to look at a picturesque group of girls drawing water at a fountain opposite their osteria. She started, and came to the window.

"Is not the donkey saddled yet?" she exclaimed, as she perceived that patient individual standing in the court, without any appearance that Dominico was thinking of getting him ready for his daily work.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" Edgar asked, forgetting that the coming day was an interesting one to her.

She made no answer then, but a moment afterwards she went to the breakfast-table, and said, "I think I will put these eggs into my basket; they are already almost cold. At Spedaletti we shall probably find nothing to eat."

"Oh, by the way, you mean to rest there. I advise you to tell Dominico to let you know when we get to it, for I should not be surprised if you did not recognize the place."

Ita informed the donkey-boy of their desire, and the party started. It seemed to Ita as if they creeped instead of walked up and down the hills, and she looked at every turn of the road with eager anxiety to see if they were yet in sight of the little village.

"Is that Spedaletti?" she asked at last, as by the eastern side of one of the sheltered and sunny bays

she saw a few houses close to the sea, and some fisherman's boats on the sand.

"Si, Signora," Dominico answered. "But there is no decent inn there," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "and nothing to see at all."

"Do you know anybody there?"

"Oh, dear no," he replied, contemptuously, "they are all *poverissima gente*."

When they approached the first ruinous, miserable-looking building, which bore that peculiar look of neglect which belongs to very poor Italian villages, he asked where they wished to stop.

"Here," she said, "I wish to get down here," and she jumped off the donkey, and went to meet Edgar.

"What do you want to do, love?" he said. "Is this the place? Can I help you in any way?"

"No, dearest," she answered, pulling out her watch. "Give me an hour all to myself; that is what I shall like best. Suppose you go and sit and read, in that empty boat in the shade of the larger vessel, while I stroll about and speak to some of the people."

"Do not overheat yourself. Have you got the umbrella?"

"Yes," she said.

He bent down and kissed her forehead, and she walked slowly on.

CHAPTER VIII.

ITA's wish, though she had not mentioned it to Edgar, was, in the first instance, to walk to the little church where she had been baptized. She had a very distinct recollection of it and of the lights on the altar, and the priest's vestments, and of having made, one day, a sudden dart at a piece of orange-peel on the pavement, and been roughly snatched up and replaced on the bench. It was not far off, and she went there; but it was noon, and the door was locked. Two little grated windows on each side allowed her, however, to look inside. It was just as she remembered it, only, of course, much smaller. Then she went to the nearest house where any one seemed stirring, for most of them were shut up like the church, almost everybody being out at work. She found one woman washing, and asked her if she had known Giovanni Piombo and his wife. She spoke first in Italian, and was not understood. Then she tried Mentonese with a little more success; but she could not get a positive answer. "*Sicuro, sicuro,*" the woman said; but when she inquired for the house where they used to live, she only got the same reply, "*Sicuro,*" and nothing came of it.

She wandered about the place, sometimes fixing on one cottage and then on another, as the one she had inhabited, but could not make out anything certain. She almost cried with vexation, though she felt it was foolish, and was just going back to the place where she had left Edgar, when she saw a priest coming towards

the church. He was the *paroco* of Colla, a town on the hill above Spedaletti, which belonged also to his parish.

Ita took courage, and went up to him. "Excuse me," she said, in Italian, "but will your Reverence have the kindness to tell me whether you knew Giovanni Piombo, a fisherman of this place, and which of these houses he lived in?"

"Giovanni Piombo," the priest repeated, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "*Sicuro*—but he has been dead these ten years."

"I know he is dead," she answered; "but where did he and his wife live?"

"A little way to the left, Signora—nearer the Marina. It was a poor cottage then, and now it is used as a shed by the men who mend the road. You are not the first person who has made inquiries about that poor *defunto*. A Signora came to see me some time ago—I think, from Mentone—to ask about him, and I have also had a letter from a lady in England. Are you of that country, Signora?"

"Yes," Ita answered, blushing a little. "I have lately come from England."

"Oh, then, no doubt you must know her. If I had her letter with me I should show it to you."

"Was the name Hendon?"

"No, no. It begins with a D. Dal—Dalass—that is it."

"What did she want to know about Giovanni Piombo? Excuse me for asking, but you said, just now, you would have shown me the letter if you had had it with you."

"And so I would. Can you come to my house at Colla?"

"I am afraid I can't."

"Oh, then, I can tell you what is in it. She wished

me to write to her the exact date of the day when Piombo picked up at sea a child, whom an English lady at Mentone afterwards adopted."

"And were you able to tell her?"

"Not the precise date of the day, but the year and the month; for I baptized the child myself; and I sent her the extract from the register." A sudden idea struck the *paroco*. "Is it, by any chance, the Signora Dalass I am speaking to?"

"No—but . . . ." Ita stopped short. She was afraid Edgar would not like her to tell the priest that it was her he had baptized in her infancy. So she began again. "No, I am not that lady, and I know nothing about her."

"Excuse me," the *paroco* rejoined; "I fancied you might be the Signora who wrote the letter."

"What place did she write from?"

"Thomas Street, in London; and there is a number, too, and something else besides London, which I forget."

"Did you not say that another lady came from Mentone to speak to you about Giovanni Piombo?"

"Ah! she was not a grand lady, that poor soul; but so good, so humble, so pious! *Povera donna!* she walked on crutches, and looked very ill. She told me her history. She had met with a terrible accident at sea, a great many years ago, and been nearly drowned. Her child was drowned, and she has never got over it. She said she had been out of her mind for some years, from a blow she had received on the head; and the pain of the heart, too, she added. *Poverina!* For a long time she was in a hospital or asylum at Genoa. At last she got better, and returned to Mentone, her native place. The people there told her that an English lady had adopted a girl which Giovanni Piombo had found in a boat at sea, and had taken her

away to England with her. So she must go and take it into her head that this must have been her child, and off she comes to me here to ask about it. But she had no clear idea when she had lost her infant, or how long she had been at the asylum, or of her own age. Some of her relatives told her one thing, and others differently. Her husband died, she said, just before that unlucky voyage, and that had begun to unsettle her mind. I am not sure that she is even now quite right in the head. Perhaps the whole thing is a *pazzia* —a delusion."

"Do you know if she is now at Mentone, and if so, where she lives?"

"Ah, no, Signora; I cannot tell you. I never saw her but that once. But it is strange that three different persons should have come to me with the same question. Can I do anything for you, Signora?"

"No, thank you," Ita answered, for she could not think at that moment what more she had to ask either about Mrs. Dallas or the poor woman at Mentone. She felt frightened at the idea that what she had sometimes in imagination sighed for, might actually come to pass, that she might discover who she was. Since her marriage she had ceased to crave for that knowledge, and the very idea of it now made her so nervous that, after taking leave of the priest, she was obliged to sit down a moment on the stone bench outside the church to try and think calmly on what he had said. A number of possible eventualities were passing through her mind, and she, whose greatest fear was always a perplexity, saw before her a future complication comprising some most difficult and painful questions. Her susceptible conscience and almost morbid tender-heartedness were already beginning to reproach her for the sudden dread which she felt of finding a parent in the poor woman the *paroco* had

mentioned, and the wish she was conscious of, that no proof should be brought forward of it, if such should be the fact. Was not this mean, unnatural and wrong? and yet do what she would, her heart sank within her at the thought of such a discovery. Then who could Mrs. Dallas be? Was it possible that Mrs. Gerald had written under that name? The direction given in the letter threw no light on the subject.

If there had been time for it she would have liked to have gone to Colla, and asked to see the letter, but Edgar was waiting and she could not tell him in a hurry what she had heard. She must first think over it. Perhaps if he had no objection, they might stop there on their way back.

She slowly walked to the shore where she had left her husband. All the pleasurable excitement of the previous hours had vanished. The very beauty of the view had lost its attractions. It seemed to her as if there was a snare in its loveliness. England, Holmwood, the Vicarage rose before her, and she longed to find herself at home—safe at home, she unconsciously said to herself. The moral suffering that might be impending on her almost seemed to her excited feelings like a physical danger. It would be so dreadful if she found a mother she should not be able to love. She could not fancy anything more painful, and she was angry with herself for dreading to discover that she was the child of a poor woman. It would be so difficult to realize the relationship. There never was a more sudden reaction. For the moment she disliked the sight of the blue sea and the olive woods. She had taken such a childish pleasure in the idea of seeing this place again, and now she was impatient to get away from it.

Edgar was struck with her paleness. "Are you not

feeling well, darling?" he said, looking anxiously in her face.

"A little tired," she said, "but let us go on. Riding," she added, forcing a smile, "is the best rest after walking."

"Have you walked far?"

"No, a very short distance."

"You had better have some luncheon; sit down here."

She obeyed, and he opened the basket. She burst into tears.

"What on earth is the matter, my dearest love?" he exclaimed.

She hid her face in her hands.

"Who have you been talking to, Ita? What nonsense it was to stop here," he said, half-anxious, half-provoked.

"I did not mean to tell you about it till I had thought more, but I must, I cannot help it. I have seen the priest of this place, or rather of Colla, there on the height . . . ."

"Has he been talking to you about religion?" Edgar asked, his eyes flashing, and the colour rushing into his face.

"Oh no, not a word, though it was he, indeed, who baptized me. But I did not tell him who I was . . . . Oh, Edgar, would you love me less if I turned out to be the child of a poor Mentonese woman?"

She again covered her face with her hands.

He answered very calmly, "My darling, if you turned out to be the hangman's daughter, I might regret the discovery, but I should not love you a bit the less. But is this a sudden fancy you have taken into your head, or have you heard anything that has given you this idea?"

"I have heard something, but it is very vague."

"Of one thing you can be quite sure, nothing of

that sort could ever make a difference in my feelings towards you. You did not think it could, did you, you foolish little woman?"

"It is very dear of you to say so," Ita said, looking brighter.

"But what has this priest been telling you?"

"A lady whose name he pronounced Dalass, I think it must be Dallas, wrote to him some time ago to inquire about the time when I was found and all about me—me as a baby, I mean. By the way, I forgot to ask him if she seemed to know my name and where I was now. If you like," Ita added, hesitatingly, "I could see him again and ask him?"

"I do not see any use in it. Is that all?"

"No; some time before a poor woman came from Mentone also to ask about me. She had been out of her mind for some years, after a shipwreck, or some accident at sea, in which she had lost her baby, and when she heard that I had been found in the way I was, she thought I might be her child . . . . and, Edgar, perhaps I am?"

"Is that all?" Edgar asked again.

"Yes; I think that is all."

"Then, my love, I advise you not to let your mind dwell a moment on the subject. Any poor crazy woman, whose child has been drowned on this coast, might take the same idea into her head. It would be as natural for her to do so, as impossible for others to draw any inference from the facts."

"She only inquired, he said, and did not seem to remember herself, anything distinctly about dates."

"Of course not. The notion is preposterous. But I am sorry we stopped here. I am sorry we came abroad. I am always afraid of your letting your mind run on conjectures as to what it is not apparently God's will you should know."

"I think I ought to try and find out this woman at Mentone when we go back. Should you mind?"

"I think it would be foolish—still, if you wish it . . . ." Edgar smiled; this was a relief to her. She felt so very nervous.

"Well," he said, gaily, "we will see about that. I am tolerably certain I shall know at first sight if this good woman is my mother-in-law or not."

"You know one cannot trust to likenesses."

"I do not agree with you there. I cannot remember ever having seen a daughter not like her mother in some one point of face, figure, or voice."

"I am very glad that you do not object to my trying to find out that poor woman. She is lame—walks on crutches, the priest said. Though it is, as you say, probably quite impossible to be at all sure about it, I should like, *in case*, just in the most distant improbable case, to do something to make her comfortable. I could ask the Abate Giovanni to look after her. And I should like to kiss her once, *in case*. I often kiss the Italian poor people. It would not seem odd, and then I could . . . ."

"Come, come, you have not found her yet," Edgar said, laughing. "I do not object to your *in cases*, or your kissing all the old women in Mentone, if you like, provided you are sensible, and do not allow your imagination to run wild, or else I shall carry you back to England at once."

"Oh! do not," she exclaimed; "I shall be more satisfied to see this poor woman. But I will not bore you with any more talk about that."

She had some luncheon, and told Edgar that the palms on the opposite side of the bay, and the dates she was eating, put her in mind of Mrs. Heman's lines:—

> "Is it where the feathery palm-trees rise,
> And the date grows ripe under sunny skies?"

He answered that those she had in her basket had been ripened by a more burning sun than that which was then making the wavelets and the pale foliage of the olive-trees glitter like silver.

As they rode up the hill which rises above Spedaletti, Ita went off into a burst of enthusiasm about Mrs. Heman's poetry, and asked Edgar if he did not think there was an unconscious Catholicism about it. "I always think," she said, "that even when she means to be a thorough Protestant, there is a spirit in her which compels her to be Catholic. Don't you remember, in the 'Forest Sanctuary,' that though she wanted to make the Spanish apostate interesting, as if in spite of herself, by far the most beautiful passage, is the one where his wife, who has not lost her faith, dies of a broken heart, while singing a hymn to the Blessed Virgin?"

"If she had lived twenty years later," Edgar answered, "I have no doubt she would have been an ardent advocate of the revival of Catholicism in our Church."

Ita did not answer; and, after a moment's silence, he said, as he looked at her hazel eyes, which had always a peculiarly beautiful expression when unspoken thoughts were passing through her mind, like light clouds over the sky, "Not a penny for your thoughts, but this wild heart's-ease for your dreams."

"Ah," she cried, "heart's-ease is worth buying! Well, I was thinking—it *was* a thought, not a dream—that most of our English modern poets, without being Catholics, write almost as if they were. My three favourite poems, for instance; I can hardly believe they were written by Protestants."

"Which do you mean? Oh, of course, 'Evangeline,' I suppose."

"Yes, and then 'The Lady of la Garaye,' and

'Guinevere,' the last of the Idylls, the most beautiful of my three favourites perhaps, though I like 'Evangeline' the best. I should like to have these three poems bound together for my own particular self."

"Well, if you are very good, as we say to children," Edgar said, laughing, "come next St. Margaret's Day, I might perhaps, at a heavy pecuniary sacrifice, manage to produce that volume."

"Oh, that will be too charming!" After a pause she said, "I am glad we are going to rest a whole day at San Remo. I am sure you are very tired, though you will not say so."

He was indeed, very tired and not feeling well; but energy with him supplied always the place of strength. Towards five o'clock they reached the large old-fashioned inn in the centre of the picturesque city of San Remo, and had just time before dark to walk to the end of the jetty, from whence there is a beautiful view of the town and the amphitheatre of hills behind it. They sat there, looking at the port full of little fishing and trading vessels, and animated by the variety of costumes which gives such life to Italian scenery. Then they strolled through the narrow streets, admiring the palaces, equal in some instances to those of Genoa, and going in and out of the numerous fine churches, which exhibit, like most of those on the Riviera, a splendour of decoration which takes travellers by surprise.

"Is it not a perfect mystery," Edgar exclaimed, as his wife led the way to a narrow bridge across a torrent edged by cactuses and aloes, "how the inhabitants of small secluded towns, at a time when they had none of the modern resources we possess, should have been able to convey up steep ascents and along narrow precipitous pathways the materials for such buildings and all the wonderful treasures of art they contain."

"Where there is a will there is a way, I suppose," Ita said; "and I should think they cared *immensely* to have beautiful churches. But now look at the palm-trees on the Piazza!"

Edgar looked, admired as much as she wished, and then they went home.

The next day, after a good night's rest, feeling refreshed, though not perhaps in quite as high spirits as when they had started on their journey, they prepared to ascend the long stony ascent which leads to the Lepers' Hospital, a charitable foundation and relic of old times, due to the Knights of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus. Alas! that the names of those saints, the badge of that Christian order, should be profaned as it is in our days!

When they came out of this building, where everything is indeed done to soften the misery of the most afflicted, perhaps, of all God's creatures, but where the sufferings humanity is exposed to are painfully conspicuous, it was a relief to breathe the pure and soft air, and ascend higher still to the magnificent sanctuary so called, *par excellence*, which in the midst of its grand terraces, adorned with cypresses and statues, and at the head of its broad flight of steps, commands one of the loveliest views of the whole coast, from Nice to Genoa.

"What a strange inequality there is in human destinies!" Ita said, when, after looking into the church, they wandered into the grove of ilexis at its back. "Here we are, enjoying ourselves as much as is possible, travelling together through this beautiful country, loath to leave each lovely spot we come to, and yet, on the whole, longing for the day when we shall turn our faces towards our own dear home—only sorry that time and space do not allow us to combine two sorts of happiness, two different kinds of lives in one; and

there are those poor creatures, with no hope of cure, no prospect of change, day after day spent in lonely, loathsome sufferings. . . . . Oh! how can people who do not believe in a future state of existence help going mad with the thought of the inequality in human destinies!"

"I believe there is less of it than you imagine. There is such a large amount of secret suffering in this world, especially of that which arises from peculiar constitutions of mind or of body."

"But sometimes all miseries seem to come together."

"Not often, I think. My idea is that God does not send to any one the trial that to their peculiar nature would be most unbearable. Sorrows, seen at a distance, appear to approach that point, but somehow or other, they do not arrive at it. Suffering seems always to stop short of what would be overwhelming."

"I never read Marie Antoinette's history without wondering how she could live through her trials. What could have made them worse—more overwhelming?"

"Remorse."

"Ah; but remorse is not exactly a trial sent by God."

"In a certain sense I think it is. Remorse is not the same thing as repentance. To one person the thought that he had done another an injury, the remembrance of a mean or cruel act of sin, would be perfect torture; whereas another person might truly repent of having committed it, but not feel the keen suffering I speak of."

"If, for instance, you had acted as Mr. Neville did about his marriage, you would never have got over the misery it would have caused you."

"Perhaps those who could not get over having acted in a particular manner would never have been tempted to do so."

"Mr. Neville looks as if he had gone through much suffering, but he seems happy now. What he could not have got over, I think, would have been if he had made his wife give up her religion for his sake, and then she had died unhappy."

"Yes, with his present convictions, that would have been very painful to him."

"One of the most terrible things, I think, that could happen to one would be to kill somebody by accident."

"Worse than on purpose?"

"Oh, but I am talking of things that could happen to one."

"I suppose we ought not to say of any crime that it is impossible we should commit it. As it is only God's grace, or the absence of temptation from our particular circumstances, which keeps us from falling into as bad sins as others."

Ita thought a little, and then said, "Well, I cannot conceive under any possible circumstances that I could kill anybody."

"Physically or morally speaking!"

"Both; I am too great a coward, and too tender-hearted."

"If you had been in Charlotte Corday's place, and had seen in a list of people doomed to death by Marat, the names of the persons you loved most in the world, and that by stabbing him you believed you could save them, might you not have been *tempted* to do so?"

"Well, perhaps I should if your name had been on the list, and I could have saved you. I had not thought of such a possibility as that. Yes, I suppose I could have done it. I once saw a woman cruelly beating a little child. I think at that moment I could have flown at her and stabbed her."

"You see, Pussy, you are not quite as safe from that temptation as you fancied."

"I know what would be the worst thing of all to have done. It would be to have made somebody bad who was once good, or prevented anybody from doing what was right."

When Ita had said those last words, she blushed deeply. The thought crossed her mind that Edgar might think she alluded to his strenuous opposition to her becoming under any circumstances a Catholic. But she need not have been afraid. He was always so firmly persuaded that whatever he did was right, that the idea of a misgiving on that point had never even occurred to him.

As they were walking back, and passing by a little shrine with an image of the Blessed Virgin, Ita ventured—it was a habit of her childhood—to lay a bunch of wild flowers she had gathered on the wayside altar.

"Will you have these?" Edgar said, offering her some white hyacinths to add to her nosegay. She was pleased, and to please him she repeated as they went on the lines in the "Christian Year"—

> "Ave Maria, Blessed Maid,
> Lily of Eden's fragrant shade!
> Ave Maria, thou whose name
> All but adoring love may claim."

To quote Keble's poetry was like a profession of faith in Anglicanism. He smiled, and no cloud obscured their enjoyment of that day. He had lost his apprehensions. She had stifled her misgivings. There was a truce at any rate between them and her soul, and thus she wrote that evening in her diary:—

"I have had only once to-day one of those thoughts that Edgar tells me to drive away as temptations. We laid flowers together at the feet of the Blessed Virgin. There is great sympathy between us."

The following day was a Sunday, and this was her record of it—

"After breakfast this morning we walked outside the town. There is no English church here, and Edgar said nothing about going to another. After following the road some little time, we turned to the right, and went up a steep paved ascent which brought us to a villa which must have been once a very beautiful place. Now the terraces and what was once the garden are in a wild, neglected state, and the paintings on the walls outside nearly effaced. We opened a door and found ourselves in a little chapel, with two altars in it, and everything arranged with the greatest care. It looked as if it must have been once very much cared for—all the smallest details were so pretty. Edgar proposed to read the service there together as we were quite alone.

"I should have liked better to read it, as we had intended, out of doors in the wood. When I am in a Catholic church I find it so difficult to pray without thinking of what I must not think of. I cannot bear to see him pass before the altar without kneeling, when I know the Blessed Sacrament is there. He used to do so when we first came abroad. He says now he cannot make out if it is present or not in foreign churches, and he seems annoyed when I tell him.

"Afterwards we strolled for two or three hours in the shade, for the sun was hot, and we were on the side of a hill quite sheltered from the wind. The wild flowers were beautiful, and the views on each side of us charming. San Remo has not the grand purple mountains or the bright look of Mentone, but it is more like what I can fancy from prints and pictures that Southern Italy must be. It has more streams, and archways, and shrines, and the people look wilder

and darker. It makes me think more of past times. There is a ruined tower on the opposite side of the valley where we were, which looked as if a story belonged to it. The man who has charge of the villa with the chapel, told us it was called the Torre di Sapia; he said the Sapias and the Borias—the Marchese Boria is his *padrone*—were the two principal families in San Remo. I wonder if there ever were a Romeo and a Juliet who only met on Sundays at Mass in that little chapel, but could see each other's windows across the valley. I am sure there must have been some romance or legend connected with that old tower. There is not a pine or a cypress about it that does not look as if it had a tale to tell.

"Just as we were thinking of walking back, the bell of the chapel rang, and Edgar proposed to attend the service. I am glad we did. The way of the Cross is such a beautiful devotion, and these poor peasants are so pious and good. He seemed pleased, and we knelt like everybody else at Benediction. I asked him if we could have stations at Holmwood. He always likes me to make that sort of remark. 'In time, perhaps,' he said. Ah me! I must give one more look at the Boria Palace, the orange-trees, and the palms in the moonlight, and then go to bed. I wish the Italian pillows were not so like stones, and the mattresses did not rustle when you lie down![1] I must not lie awake to-night thinking of what I heard from the priest at Colla. If I did what I wish, I should try to see him again to-morrow, but Edgar would not like it; and he is so good on that subject, that I must not annoy him about it. If I should ever discover that I am that poor woman's daughter, he would make me do exactly what I ought. I can trust him entirely. He is more to

[1] At that time, San Remo had not reached the height of civilization with all its attendant luxuries, which it has now attained.

me than any husband ever was to a wife, for I have no one else in the world but him. I belonged to no one till he took me to be his own."

The bells of San Ciro began to ring as church bells are apt to do in Italy, at all sorts of unexpected hours. Ita laid down to rest, but the sound kept her awake, and thoughts would come into her mind which she kept off in the day, but that haunted her often in the silent hours of the night. Almost unconsciously she murmured, "O Church of all lands! O true and mighty mother! One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic! Meet mother for one who never knew an earthly parent or a native land! Why cannot I, why ought I not to belong to you?"

CHAPTER IX.

When after three days' journey under less favourable circumstances than before, as a change in the weather had set in, and wind and rain succeeded to dust and sunshine, Edgar and Ita found themselves again at Mentone, the first thing they saw on the drawing-room table of the villa were English visiting cards.

"Only think of Lady Emma and Mr. Lorton being here!" Ita exclaimed. "I hope they have not left, and that we shall see them."

She had cared very little to set eyes on that couple when they were staying within a few miles of the Vicarage. But it was different abroad. There is an excitement and pleasure in meeting English acquaintances in a foreign country, whom at home we should never have thought of going out of our way to seek. Cold as we often are to one another, sympathy with those whose mother-tongue compatriots with our own,

lies very deep in our hearts. Edgar looked delighted, and said, "I should have gone at once to see if they are still at the hotel, but I am so tired!"

He looked pale and exhausted, and threw himself on the sofa as if hardly able to hold up his head.

"Shall *I* go? But it is almost dinner-time. We ordered it at six, you know. But I can send a note. Perhaps they would come here this evenirg. When people are travelling, they often do not mind a little additional moving about."

She accordingly wrote this note:—

"DEAR LADY EMMA,—We are just this moment returned from a journey on foot and donkey-back along the Corniche. If you are not as tired as we are, perhaps you would pay us a little visit this evening. It would give us so much pleasure to see you and hear all your English news. If you are not inclined to come out so late, we shall try to find you to-morrow, immediately after breakfast, unless you would, indeed, breakfast with us at ten.—Yours sincerely,

"MARGARITA DERWENT."

When they were half way through their dinner, Ita's little messenger returned and brought a verbal answer. The Signore and the Signora would come between eight and nine o'clock. She liked showing the villa to their English friends, and made a few changes in the room to set it off to advantage, and even slipped out to gather some roses, heliotrope, and geranium, with which she made a wonderful bouquet for the time of year. On the red Genoa table-cover, with the light of the lamp shining upon it, her flowers looked beautiful. It was provoking that the night was rather dark, so that it was not of much use to open the blinds—shutters there were none—in order to exhibit the view. Still the sea and the few lights here and there in the

town were visible. She could not have fancied beforehand that a visit from Lady Emma Lorton could have given her so much pleasure.

"Do not, please, fidget about so much, darling," her husband said, "I feel very sleepy; and put a shade over the lamp, it hurts my eyes."

He leant back in the arm-chair, and closed them with a look of pain. Ita saw that he shivered. "I am sure he has caught cold," she thought, with that sinking of heart which those who watch a person in delicate health know so well. The previous day had been one of ceaseless rain, a hopeless drenching downpouring from morning to night, which, when it does rain in Italy, is generally the case. They had not left Bordighiera half-an-hour before it began. She knew he was over-fatigued with walking, and might, therefore, all the more easily have caught a chill. Now she almost wished they had not asked the Lortons to come. She tried to read, but could not do anything but watch Edgar, who was leaning back in his chair half-asleep, but coughed now and then and looked flushed.

Soon after eight o'clock the door-bell rang; it was not, however, the English travellers, but Mr. Neville, who was asking if they were at home. When he came in, Edgar roused himself and talked about their excursion. When that subject was exhausted, he said, "I suppose you know the Lortons. We were surprised to find they were here. They are coming to see us this evening."

"I met them at Grantley Manor last autumn. Then they were the people I saw in the street to-day. I could not make out their faces, they passed so quickly, but I was sure they were English."

Edgar was a little annoyed that the Lortons should happen to find Mr. Neville with them. He knew Lady

Emma thought he went *too far* in some things, and had very unjustly accused him of Romanizing tendencies. A foreign Abbé would not have signified, but to find an English Roman Catholic priest, a convert, too, on familiar terms with them, might rather strengthen that impression. There was no help for it, however, and in a short time the bell rang again, and this time Lady Emma and her husband appeared.

The meeting was much more warm and cordial on both sides than it would have been if they had fallen in with each other in England. The two ladies actually kissed each other. At the first moment Lady Emma did not recognize Mr. Neville; but when he was named she shook hands with him, and asked if he had heard lately from Mrs. Walter Sydney. After they had answered all the usual questions about their journey, and said they were on their way to Rome, and going to start early the next day, Edgar asked them if they were pleased with Mentone.

"It is very pretty," Lady Emma said, "the scenery is lovely; but I cannot imagine how you can live here. There must be such a want of interest and occupation."

"Of course there is," Edgar replied; "but unfortunately Mr. Neville and I are both condemned to rest."

"The climate has done Edgar good," Ita said.

Lady Emma looked at him, and answered, "I should not say he looked better than he did in England. Hardly as well, I think."

"That is only because he is very tired to-day," Ita replied.

"It is a mistake coming abroad for health," Edgar said; "what is gained in one way is lost in another."

"The people seem dreadfully poor here," Mr. Lorton observed. "It is shocking to see women turned into beasts of burden."

"And the begging!" Lady Emma exclaimed. "It is disgusting to be asked for sous by every child you meet."

"Do you really think the begging here as bad as that of the London beggars?" Ita asked. "It is such a good-humoured sort of thing. If Edgar threatens them in play they run away laughing; and it is only very old people and children who beg here. In London it is so dreadful to see those half-naked, crouching, shivering creatures, shuffling along the streets, and speaking with that peculiar whine they all have. Oh, Lady Emma, how can you think anything here as bad?"

"You must know that my wife is fanatical about Mentone," Edgar said.

"London beggars are dreadful," Mr. Lorton observed; "but then nobody in his senses ever gives to them."

"These people live in such shocking places," Lady Emma said. "On our way to the cemetery I saw some of the places they inhabit; dens, only fit for beasts."

"As far as that goes," Edgar said, "I suspect that your standard of comparison is the average of cottages on your father's or Mr. Lorton's estates. If you had been used, as I have, to the dwellings of the poor in St. Giles's or the Borough, you would not, perhaps, be quite as much shocked with the places they live in here. In point of misery I would back London against any part of the world I have ever been in. They have to work, no doubt, very hard here to live; but there is employment for every one, great industry, and the most remarkable purity of morals. I have heard that from you, Mr. Neville, and others also."

"Yes; early marriages and religious principles have that effect here, just as they have also in Ireland."

"But early, imprudent marriages are what we strongly deprecate," Mr. Lorton said.

"Then you must accept the consequences of discouraging them. Of course, in an over-populated country, what is natural and right in itself becomes difficult. But I have no business to praise the Mentonese before Mrs. Derwent. She is eloquent on the subject of the virtues and modesty of the women and girls here, and she knows them better than I do."

"They are as good as bread!" Ita exclaimed, with more earnestness than eloquence.

"Of course, we expect to find in a small place like this," Lady Emma said, "greater morality than in large towns. It is fortunate they are good, for they seem very dirty and ignorant."

"Dirty!" Ita indignantly exclaimed. "I assure you it is no such thing. If you sit in the midst of the poorest crowd at San Michele . . . ."

"Oh, come," Edgar exclaimed, "you are going too far in your defence."

"I must come to Mrs. Derwent's assistance," Mr. Neville said.

"I will back the cleanliness of a Mentonese congregation against that of a London one, composed of poor people."

"But in London who would think of going to such a church?" Mr. Lorton observed.

"If you were here on a Sunday, Lady Emma," Ita said, "you would see all the women and girls in their neat petticoats and jackets, their hair so nicely done, with a flower stuck behind the ear, instead of those ragged shawls and bonnets out of shape, that look as if they had been picked up in the gutter, which poor people wear in England."

"Well, I am glad to hear it. You must know better than I do. I only speak of my impressions."

"But why do you think them so ignorant?"

"I have asked several of the children if they could read, and they say no."

"Nor ever will, I expect," Edgar said, "till they are annexed to France, which it is supposed, will be the case some day. Not that I think they understand your questions, Lady Emma. For they speak neither French nor Italian. My wife has it all her own way here, for she chatters with them in their dialect, and then reports that all they say is right and charming. But I do believe they are well instructed in their religion."

"That is what I mean," Ita said. "They are not ignorant in that way, though they cannot read. You would never find here any one who had not heard of God or of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they can all say the Our Father and the Hail Mary."

"That is all very well as far as it goes," Lady Emma said, "except of course . . . ."

She did not finish her sentence, out of civility to Mr. Neville.

"But it is very sad they cannot read. There is not a child in our village that does not go to school."

"On your own estates?" Mr. Neville asked.

"Yes, and those I have ever had to do with. I give up London. I am perfectly aware that there is dreadful vice and misery there, but in the country. . . . ."

"Well, but in the country? S. G. O.'s letters give a melancholy picture of the state of morality in the rural districts and villages of his part of England. The agricultural districts, as a whole, are not, according to his account, superior in that respect to the towns."

"He is a very eccentric person, and rather given to exaggerate," Lady Emma answered with a heightened colour.

"Should you say Lord Shaftesbury's statements as

to the moral and religious condition of the poorer classes in England were to be depended upon ?"

"I would not vouch for their correctness. But I see what you are driving at, Mr. Neville, and, as I like plain speaking, I will answer what I know is your thought. You wish to prove that secluded places where the people are ignorant—like here, for instance, or in Ireland—remain free from vice when they belong to the Catholic Church, whereas, if abandoned to Protestantism, they become wicked."

"I would not speak in so strong or so general a manner as that Lady Emma. I believe that there are countries where Protestantism prevails—Sweden, for instance—where amongst the poor purity of life still exists, and faith in some of the principal doctrines of Christianity."

"I have no sympathy," Lady Emma rejoined, "with Protestantism. It has impeded, for many generations, the work of our National Church, and prevented the beneficial effect it would have produced on our poorer classes had it been allowed free scope. It is an incubus which the Church of England is gradually shaking off, and we are beginning to reap the benefits of the revival amongst us of a pure Catholicism. I am quite willing to allow that your Church does a great deal of good abroad, though you must not be angry if I say that travelling on the Continent does not incline one to join your communion, if indeed such a thought could ever enter the mind of an Anglo-Catholic."

"In what way would it militate against such an inclination?" Mr. Neville asked.

Edgar and Ita were listening eagerly to this conversation. Mr. Lorton, who did not take so much interest as he appeared to do before his marriage in the subjects which occupied his wife, took up "Galignani's

Messenger" with a look of resignation which expressed, "We are in for it now."

"Do you wish me to speak frankly?"

"Certainly."

"Then in the first instance, the way in which so many of the shops in France are open on Sundays, and the workmen being employed as usual, is very shocking."

"Is that, do you think, the fault of the Roman Catholic Church? There is an association composed both of priests and laymen for the express purpose of promoting the better observance of Sunday."

"Oh, really! But there ought to be laws, as with us, to enforce it."

"That would depend on the government and the nation, not on the Church."

"But if the bishops were really to interest themselves in the matter, and to petition the government on the subject—the Bishop of Orleans, for instance, who they say is such an influential person, such a great preacher—they would obtain it."

Edgar, who knew a little more of the state of France than Lady Emma, could not help smiling.

Mr. Neville answered, "I have no doubt the Bishop would gladly try to obtain from the French Government, that at any rate the public works of the country should not be carried on on Sunday, but there would be as little chance of his succeeding as there would be of Cardinal Wiseman obtaining from Parliament that the days of obligation in our Church should be observed like Sunday."

"Then I never saw anything so slovenly as the way in which some of your services are conducted. The boys who serve at Mass are sometimes so ragged, and I have seen them laugh and look about them. Really, Mr. Neville, it is difficult to imagine that they are

taught to believe in the doctrine of the Real Presence!"

"Is it not very difficult, also, to conceive that we are all taught, and do believe that we are constantly and at all times in the presence of Almighty God. A person who was told, for the first time, that this is an article of our creed, might express, I think, the same surprise if he watched even good people at every moment of their lives."

"Ah, but when engaged in an act of religious worship, children should learn to be reverent."

"They certainly ought; but if you are scandalized at their negligence and inattention at times, have you not, on the other hand, been touched at seeing little children coming by themselves into church to say an unbidden prayer, and the devout way in which they kiss a crucifix or a holy picture?"

"I have not happened to see that. I can, of course, only observe what comes under my notice. But there are other things too. There is such an absence of truth in Catholic countries!"

"Is there? A special one in Catholic countries?"

"Yes; it meets you everywhere. We had ordered the other day a carriage, one of the few that are to be found here. It never came, and the coachman said a Mrs. Ramwood, who is at the hotel, had gone out in it, and kept him out beyond the time we had named. But I asked her about it, and it turned out that she had not been out in it at all."

Edgar did not quite like this form of attack on the Catholic Church, and Mr. Neville said quite gravely—

"It is just possible that this coachman may not have been a Catholic, though I do not mean by that to imply that Catholics never tell lies nor make false excuses."

"Of course I know nothing about the man; and I do not say it proves anything—only it is the sort of thing one meets with abroad."

"And never in England?"

"Ah! but there is this difference—we do what is wrong, but we do not pretend it is right. We do not compound for sins as you do. We do not think we can make up for them by almsgiving."

"And you suppose we are allowed to do so?"

"You say alms cover a multitude of sins."

"It is the Bible that says so."

"But you attach a particular meaning to those words."

"Yes, we certainly do."

"Now, I had a French maid when I first married—a Roman Catholic. She was not at all over-particular about honesty. I do not say she was positively dishonest, but she went very near the mark. Taking money from tradespeople, and all that sort of thing. Well, she often gave money in charity, and I have no doubt she thought she made up in that way for her want of strict honesty."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No; but that is just the Roman Catholic spirit."

"My dear Lady Emma, you prove your assertion by the statement of a fact, and then support that fact by repeating your assertion. If it was impossible for a person to restore money which they had defrauded another person of, the best atonement in their power might then be to give it to the poor; but if restitution was practicable, they would be bound to make it; and under no circumstances would they go on cheating others, and suppose they were making up for it by giving alms. If they made sincere confessions, they would be told so. I have often had to restore money to persons who had been defrauded of it, when those

who have confessed to me have acknowledged their sin. At the same time, I must say that it was better for this dishonest maid of yours to have given what she did in alms, than to have spent it in other ways—on her dress, for instance. It did not lessen her sin, but perhaps the prayers of those she relieved might have obtained for her the grace of repentance."

"I do not say she was positively, really dishonest."

"Then, if you have any doubt on the subject, she may be supposed to have had some herself, and if so, we may charitably hope she gave alms with a good conscience."

"Still I cannot help thinking that Roman Catholics who lead bad lives often give alms as a sort of set-off."

"No Catholic could think that almsgiving would absolve him from the guilt of sin unrepented of and persevered in; but if he was sinning from weakness, from inability to resist temptation, he might hope, as I said just now, that alms might win him the grace to overcome his passions."

"It disgusts one to see people do wrong, and then give themselves the merit of charity."

"And is it only among Catholics that you see it? Have not Protestants, whose names were foremost in all subscription lists—men who built chapels and supported Bible Societies—by their dishonesty, not cheated one individual, but plunged into ruin and despair hundreds and hundreds of helpless persons who had thought their names and their reputation a sufficient guarantee for implicit confidence?"

"Those men must have been simply dreadful hypocrites, and have had no religion at all."

"I would not venture to assert it. They may have had a vague idea of compensating by acts of munificence for their reckless conduct towards their victims."

"I suppose you think," Edgar said, "that we are rather inclined, as a nation, to see the mote in our neighbour's eye, and to overlook it in our own?"

"Not exactly to overlook it. What surprises me, on the contrary, is the way in which our public press, and Englishmen in general, while on the one hand they expose in unmeasured terms the social miseries and moral evils at home, on the other hand assume towards other nations the tone, not merely of lords of humankind, as Goldsmith called them, but of its models and guides, and preach to others as if we presented the most perfect pattern of public and domestic virtue. Thundering articles in the 'Times' and other newspapers proclaim to the world that the state of London is disgraceful, that Hyde Park cannot be crossed with safety after dark, and that women are attacked by sturdy beggars even in the privileged region of Belgravia; that, on an average, four hundred persons disappear in London every year, who are never heard of again; that the number of infants murdered nightly is too startling to state; and that daring robberies are committed in mid-day in our streets. And then if, the next day, the correspondent from Rome, for instance, writes that it is not safe to drive to Frascati, or that an Englishman has been robbed of his watch in an hotel at Rome, there is an outburst of indignation against the Pope's Government. 'What a dreadful state of things!' 'How can it be suffered to exist?' and so on."

"But everybody admits," Mr. Lorton exclaimed, "that the Papal Government *is* the worst in Europe."

"So far from its being generally admitted, I could bring a number of unprejudiced witnesses to the contrary. I am convinced that a person who would go into the question fairly, and examine into the physical and moral condition of the inhabitants of Rome and

of London, would give a verdict in favour of the first. I am not speaking now of the preference which any one may have for one form of government over another. I have heard that when one of our most eminent statesmen was asked on his return from Italy, 'Well, are you converted? Have you seen a miracle?' that he answered, 'I am not converted, but I have seen a miracle—a people perfectly happy under what we consider the worst government in the world.' In everything that relates to the treatment of the poor, Rome can challenge comparison with any city in Europe. Its prisons are admirably managed. Even in the last century, when ours were in a deplorable state, Howard, the philanthropist, as he is called, found the Roman ones well and humanly governed."

"I cannot believe," Edgar said, "that the union of the spiritual and temporal power can be favourable to religion."

"That is a separate question again, and though I have a very decided opinion myself on that point, I will not argue about it at this moment. What I am contending for is simple equity. What I ask is, that a robbery in Rome, or a murder, should not be considered as a proof that the Pope's Government is a bad one, and the Roman population in a discontented, disaffected state, when similar events elsewhere do not lead to the same conclusions."

"But it is such a tyrannical Government," Lady Emma exclaimed. "The other day, when we were in Paris, Lady Charlotte Rosebank told us, that last winter, in Rome, she was complaining to Cardinal Antonelli that her hotel-keeper had charged her outrageously, and then been very impertinent. His Eminence said, immediately, 'Why did not you let me know? We should have put the man into prison at once.'"

"I suspect," Mr. Neville said, "that if the story is true the Cardinal was guilty of a jest, the point of which the lady did not perceive. Those who are loudest in the abuse of tyranny in the abstract, are sometimes suspected of not being sorry to have it exercised in their behalf. A government may be arbitrary and not at all tyrannical—the terms are not synonymous."

"I agree with you there," Edgar said. "Great injustices are often perpetrated without any deviation from the letter of the law. But to return to my great objection; I cannot reconcile in my mind the worldly pomp of the Court of Rome with my ideas of Apostolical simplicity."

"But there is not a prince in the world whose own mode of living is so simple and economical as the Pope's. As far as worldly pomp goes I cannot understand that those who do not object to the Anglican bishops living in palaces, to their wives driving about in smart carriages, and their children inheriting large fortunes, should take exception at the splendour of the Vatican, combined as it has generally been with a very great austerity and simplicity in the lives of most of the Popes."

"Whatever may be said on that point," Mr. Lorton said, "our strong feeling about religious liberty must always make us look with dislike on the Papal Government."

"There again," Mr. Neville exclaimed; "there is one of those popular delusions prevalent I maintain in England. One would think, by the tone always assumed on that subject, that the most perfect liberty and equality about religion existed under the British Government in particular, and in Protestant countries generally; whereas, in the first case, we are only slowly progressing towards it even in theory, and practically

poor persons who are not Protestants, paupers and prisoners especially, have still to suffer much hardship and injustice on account of their religion. As to Sweden, Denmark, and some of the smaller States of Germany, their laws against liberty of conscience are far more stringent and rigorous than in any Catholic country; yet bigotry and intolerance are always spoken of as connected with Catholicism and not with Protestantism."

"But you cannot really mean that Protestants, and especially English Protestants, have not been the most strenuous supporters of religious liberty at home and abroad."

"For themselves and their co-religionists certainly. But I appeal to the history of Ireland. Has religious liberty existed there? does religious equality, without which liberty can hardly be said to be a reality, even now exist there?"

"I am so tired," Lady Emma cried, "of hearing Ireland always brought forward against us."

The colour rose in Mr. Neville's face, and he answered nothing, for he felt that had he spoken at all it would have been too warmly.

She suddenly recollected he was Irish, and was sorry she had said what she had. "Of course," she added, "there were dreadful persecutions in past times, and I should never wish to defend them."

"I am the last person in the world," Mr. Neville said, with a quivering lip, "who ought to attack persecutors, but the fatal experience I have had of the results of Protestant ascendency and pride in Ireland, make me shudder when I think of them. But having come here only to inquire after Mr. and Mrs. Derwent's health after their journey, I have stayed beyond my usual hour."

"Do not look at the clock," Ita said, "it partakes

of the general ignorance at Mentone about hours. Clocks never tell, and nobody knows here, what o'clock it is."

"I really ought to have been at home long ago," Mr. Neville answered, and got up to go away.

Lady Emma, as well as the Derwents, shook hands with him, and when he had left the room, she said, "He is very pleasing, so gentleman-like and refined. One can understand his having been very attractive in his youth, though not handsome. But Roman Catholics are always on the defensive. You cannot find fault with anything abroad without their immediately beginning to attack England. It is so unpatriotic. I have always observed that English converts lose all affection for their own country."

"Oh, Lady Emma, do you think so?" Ita exclaimed. "Mr. Walter Sydney and his wife are such thorough John Bulls."

"I suppose," Edgar said with a smile, "that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

"But I do not like their picking up the stones to throw them at us."

"It is a disagreeable mode of argument, certainly, but a tempting one."

Ita had felt all the evening as if she would very much like to throw a small stone, that would not have hurt her much, at Lady Emma's head. She was so angry at her speech about Ireland. To a generous nature there is nothing more revolting than sneers at those who have suffered at our hand. She was glad that Edgar changed the subject by saying, "But now do tell us some news. Have you been lately at Carsdale?"

"Yes, just before we left England, and to Holmwood one day. I saw Miss Derwent about three weeks ago."

"Looking as well as usual?"

"Yes, the picture of health. She takes a great deal of exercise now. Since you have been away she goes more amongst the poor people, I fancy."

"I felt sure she would," Ita said.

"I am delighted to hear it," Edgar rejoined. "It almost comforts me for being away. It will be so good both for them and for herself. Did you see Mrs. Gerald?"

"No; from what Miss Derwent says, I should be afraid she must be in a sadly nervous state. The least thing agitates her. It is lucky your cousin does not know what nerves are, for living alone with a person in that state must be very depressing. She took me to see your house; she is making some alterations in the kitchen-garden, adding a piece of land to it on one side, and on the other making a connecting-link, as she calls it, between the useful and the agreeable, that is, the flowers and the vegetables. I think it will be very pretty. I hope it was not meant as a surprise; if so, you must pretend not to have heard anything about it."

"I am sure she is arranging a sunny corner," Ita observed. "You said one day that every kitchen-garden ought to have a sunny corner for common flowers."

"Yes; I remember our talking about it. Annie delights in gardening."

"I never in my life saw anybody work so hard. And she carries such weights on her head. It is so absurd. That is her great amusement just now. You mentioned in one of your letters that the women here have extraordinarily strong necks, and carry weights which no ordinary person could lift up. So she practises this art or feat, and loads a washerwoman's basket with a lot of things, which she brings in that

way from her garden to yours. She insisted on my trying. I could not keep what she had been carrying for a minute on my head, which made her laugh. What a grown-up child she is."

"Yes; she has the simplicity of a child, with the good sense of a woman."

"Does she sometimes see the sisters?"

"I have not heard, but I should doubt her going there often now. I suppose you have heard the report about the Rolands?"

"No; he wrote to me some time ago, and said he should have to tell me soon of something that would, he feared, give me pain. I thought he had perhaps been offered another living. If it was a good one, I should be glad, though very sorry for ourselves."

"It is said that he is on the point of joining the Church of Rome."

Ita was frightened at the expression of suffering which came over her husband's face. He had been looking ill all the evening, but now he was quite white.

"Roland! Roland of all people!" he ejaculated.

"It is a perfect infatuation," Lady Emma said. "They have not a penny in the world. One child, and another coming. And then it is so wrong—so peculiarly wrong in one who has seemed so deeply alive to his sacred obligations. I was perfectly thunderstruck when I heard it from what I fear was good authority."

Mr. Lorton got up and warmed his hands at the fire. He no longer exactly re-echoed his wife's opinions, as in the time of his courtship, and came out occasionally with remarks by no means agreeable to her.

"They will all end in that way," he said, "those High Church people. It passes my comprehension how in these days anybody can be such a fool as to

become a Catholic. I consider it simply as a proof of imbecility. But clever people are such fools. They ruin everything."

Ita could hardly help smiling. Lady Emma did not smile, and said in a severe manner: "That is not the way to look at the subject. It is a sin, not merely a folly, to leave the Church of our baptism."

"I cannot believe it of Roland," Edgar exclaimed. "And his wife—what of her?"

"She is laid up on the sofa, expecting her confinement."

"But, I mean, is she also shaken in her allegiance to our Church?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I did not hear her particularly mentioned. The Rolands were spoken of as about to become Roman Catholics."

"I wonder if it is true?" Ita ejaculated.

"He will write to me, of course, before he takes any decisive step," Edgar said. "I thought they neither of them looked as happy this year as they might have done."

"I cannot imagine what is to become of them," Lady Emma said. "I knew you would be shocked. They were so near you at Holmwood, and were doing so much good among the poor at Bramblemoor."

Ita felt the news very much. In some way almost as much as her husband. Conversions to the Catholic from the Anglican Church had hitherto generally been rather a subject of secret rejoicing to her, but then none had ever touched her so nearly as this. Since her marriage she had become very much attached to Eliza. They had had a common work and interest, and Bramblemoor was very near her heart. Whatever sympathy or spiritual consolation she had ever derived from the services of the Church of England, were connected with that place. It was not the same thing at

Holmwood. There she had known the greatest possible happiness of another sort, but at Bramblemoor her soul had for the first time received strong religious impressions, and her distant, humble, reverential affection for Edgar, at a time when she did not dream that it would meet with requital, gave something sweet as well as sacred to those recollections. It was very sad to think of Eliza's departure; and it seemed as if with the Rolands another prop was giving way in her own faith in the Anglican Church.

At the same time, for her emotions were not logical —if indeed the two words can ever be used in juxtaposition—she was conscious of a strong sympathy with the step they were about to take. It was like seeing friends emigrating to another land; like standing on the shore, and watching them embark; she bade them mentally Godspeed, but it was with a heavy heart.

Edgar was so painfully engrossed with this piece of intelligence that he could hardly reply to Mr. Lorton's comments on the articles he had been studying in "Galignani's Messenger." Ita had taken Lady Emma to the window to look at the view. A break in the clouds had given the moon an opportunity of throwing a stormy light on the rough sea, and the town was visible beyond the dark masses of olive wood. After admiring it for an instant, Lady Emma said, "How ill your husband looks! How can you let him take such long walks, and over-fatigue himself so dreadfully. He is one of our most valuable men; so Catholic in everything, and at the same time such a thorough Anglican. You really must take more care of him. Miss Derwent says she is so afraid his eyes will get worse if his general weakness increases."

To be lectured by Lady Emma about taking care of Edgar, and to be told of Annie's anxiety, as if any solicitude could equal her own, was so irritating that

Ita could not answer. She pressed her forehead against the glass of the window and said nothing.

"I see he is quite cut up about the Rolands. After doing so much for them as he has, it must be a great disappointment. I never liked them very much; I had always a misgiving that there was something unsteady about him. Rather a weak mind; not a sort of person one felt confidence in. Miss Derwent is more vexed about it than can be described. She said that a great annoyance of that sort might make Mr. Derwent positively ill. She could not imagine anything he would mind more. Do you not think so?" she asked, observing Ita made no reply.

"Edgar is not well this evening," she answered. "I am afraid he has caught cold."

"Then I am sure we ought to leave you. The best thing will be for him to go to bed early. I hope you do not let him write at night. Miss Derwent says he hurts his eyes so much in that way."

Ita felt her heart swelling; she did not say that when he was too restless to sleep, she often sat by his side writing for him, till her fingers ached and her head throbbed, but she felt that if she was to see much of Lady Emma, she should find it difficult to endure her, and that she might even make her dislike Annie. Dislike Annie! Could it be possible, she asked herself, that such a thought had crossed her mind! Annie, to whom they owed everything.

At last Lady Emma told her husband that they must go, and with a kiss rather less cordial than the one with which they had greeted each other, the ladies parted. Edgar took a candle when they were gone, and left the room without making any remark on the news they had heard. He slept badly, and in the morning seemed feverish and ill.

CHAPTER X.

THREE days had elapsed since the visit of the Lorton's, and since then no one had called at the Villa Hendon. Edgar was getting gradually worse. He was evidently very ill, and Ita began to feel that sudden terror of encountering such a trial, far from home and friends, which often abroad takes young people by surprise. They have not pictured it to themselves till it has actually come upon them.

Edgar was not much disposed at any time to see a physican ; and an Italian one especially she knew he would not hear of. He had been always more or less delicate, but, since she had known him, never really ill. She felt perplexed at her loneliness. His disinclination to cultivate the acquaintance of her Mentonese friends had reduced her intercourse with them to the exchange of a few formal visits, and among the English visitors, of which the number was comparatively small at that time, she only knew the Nilsons and Mr. Neville. She was not sorry when after going in and out of her husband's room all the morning, and feeling every hour more restless and anxious, she saw from the window where she was standing in a listless manner gazing absently on the sea, and wondering whence help would come to her, Mrs. Nilson approaching the gate, and then walking into the garden. She hastened to the drawing-room, and rang the bell at once to tell the servant to show her in. "It is very kind of you

to call," she said, going to meet her; "I am very glad to see you. Mr. Derwent is very unwell indeed; what ought I to do about a doctor? Lady Emily had always her own with her, and so I know nothing about the physicians here."

Mrs. Nilson's calm, placid face contrasted in a remarkable manner with Ita's agitated countenance. She smiled, and said, "We are all homœopaths, dear Mrs. Derwent. So we have no experience about the allopathic physicians. Dr. Mandrossi is reckoned the best here, I believe; but if you will allow me I will prescribe for Mr. Derwent. I always doctor myself, Mr. Nilson, and the children. We have at home a homœopathic medicine-chest and Dr. Bell's book."

Poor Ita! could she even have made sure of Edgar's consent, she would have dreaded the idea of entrusting him to Mrs. Nilson's management. Without expressly refusing the offer, she said, "I suppose Doctor Mandrossi would want to bleed him?"

"Certainly he would."

"But that is despairing, for he is the sort of person that ought never to be bled!"

"You had better try some aconite and mercury, but I should like first to feel his pulse."

Ita said that if Mrs. Nilson would be so kind as to wait a moment, she would go and see if her husband was awake. He had not slept for three nights, but sometimes dozed off in the day for a while. "Dearest love," she said, going up to his bed, "as the salvolatile and camphor have done you no good, I am sure we ought to send for a doctor."

"My darling, I will not say as old Mrs. Sydney used to do, that I would sooner die than be bled, but as I am sure I should die if they bled me, it is useless to see a man whose only idea of curing me would be to produce his lancet."

"Then would you mind taking some homœopathic globules. Mrs. Nilson is here, and she says she knows about them, and doctors all her own family."

Edgar smiled, and said, "Dear love, spare me Mrs. Nilson and her globules."

Poor Ita did not feel inclined to smile. "But Edgar, you really must do something; you are not at all well." She saw he was very ill. His hand was burning, and his breathing oppressed. "Do, darling, let me send for Dr. Mandrossi, and I shall tell him you must not be bled."

"No, my love; get Mrs. Nilson to lend you her globules and her book, and physic me yourself."

This was a bright idea, and Ita thought she would try. So she went back to the drawing-room and said, "You know, dear Mrs. Nilson, that men when they are ill are not very manageable, and though my husband thinks it very kind of you to have offered to prescribe for him, he does not feel well enough to see a stranger. I mean . . . ."

"I know what you mean," Mrs. Nilson said, with a kind smile. "But what is to be done, will he see Doctor Mandrossi?"

"Oh no, he will not hear of that; I was thinking that if you could lend me your homœopathic book, we could see perhaps what he ought to take, and you would give it me."

"Certainly. I will send the book to you directly, and the medicine-chest with it."

"But I should like to consult with you as to the quantities."

"I will bring it you myself."

"How kind you are," Ita said, with tears in her eyes, "you are such a comfort to me."

"I hope you seek comfort, dear Madam, where only it can be truly found."

"I try," Ita answered, the tears running down her cheeks.

Mrs. Nilson, who was a very gentle person, with that peculiar placid manner and subdued voice which belong to good people of the Evangelical school, took her hand and said, "You do not rely, I hope, on your own efforts?"

"Oh no. God alone can help me to bear this great trial."

"You have, I hope, found the truth as it is in Jesus?" Mrs. Nilson asked, as she looked wistfully into the young face which in sorrow, as in joy, never failed to interest those who watched its expression.

"Found the truth!" Ita thought. "No, she could not say she had yet found the answer to the great question, 'What and where is truth?'" But she was little inclined to argue at that moment, and so she only said, "I hope I love our Blessed Lord, and I wish and try to do His will."

Mrs. Nilson sighed. The reply did not quite satisfy her; but she, too, felt that that was not the time for discussion; so pressing Ita's hand, she said she would go home at once, and soon return with the book and the globules.

Ita went back to her husband's room, and sat down by his bedside. He complained of great soreness in the chest, and of a sharp pain in his side. There was a painful look of excitement in his eyes, and a flush on his cheeks, which betokened increasing fever. She felt dreadfully helpless, and could only go backwards and forwards from the bed to the window, eagerly watching for Mrs. Nilson's return, and speaking little words of endearment to Edgar, smiling about the globules, and saying she was sure they would do him good. He tried to smile too, but his sufferings were great, and to speak was beginning to be an effort. He

asked Ita for a little crucifix he always carried about with him. She brought it, and then, hearing the door-bell ring, went to meet Mrs. Nilson.

"The fever is increasing," she said; "his mouth is so parched that he can hardly speak. His hands are burning, and his breathing seems to me very short. I am sure it is an inflammation of the lungs."

"You must give him some aconite."

It was well that there was some one with a steadier hand than poor Ita's to shake the globules out of the bottle and count them.

"There, take these three, dear Madam, to your dear patient, and let us hope they will do him good; and as we must think of the poor soul as well as the body, you might, perhaps, ask him if Mr. Nilson might come and read to him. He would reckon it a privilege to minister to a brother clergyman."

Ita felt convinced that Mr. Nilson's ministrations would not be acceptable to Edgar; but she said she would ask him, and she carried away the medicine. In a few minutes she came back and said, "He has taken them; he is much obliged to you, but he will not trouble Mr. Nilson to come to him at present. If he can attend to reading, I can read to him, you know."

When she had given Edgar the message, he had shaken his head, and, taking up the crucifix, he whispered to her, "I would rather die, if it is God's will I should do so, with this in my hand, than with any human aid I can have here. If I should get worse I may indeed wish to receive the Sacrament. In that case I will let Mr. Nilson know. You can read to me later a few verses of the Psalms."

"I hope," Mrs. Nilson said, "that the aconite will produce sleep, as well as reduce the fever. I should advise you to darken the room, and to leave Mr. Der-

went quite quiet for a while. I will remain here if I can be of any use."

Ita said she would be glad if she would, and, leaving the door of the bed-room open, she came back and sat down by her. It was a relief not to be alone during those hours of anxiety. She hid her face in her hands, and remained a moment silent.

"My dear Madam," Mrs. Nilson said, "this is indeed a time when you must feel the vanity of all human helps."

"No, indeed," Ita answered; "I think God is very good in sending us human helps. Your coming to-day, for instance, has been a great support to me. I should have gone distracted if I had been quite alone."

"But what I meant is, that at such moments you must, I think, realize that no creature can assist you; that you must go to God alone and pray only to Him, not like the poor deluded Papists, who kneel before a crucifix, or cry to the Virgin Mary in their troubles."

Ita had been feeling all that day the paralyzing effect on the mind of an intense anxiety, complicated by perplexity how to act. The power of praying seemed for the time to have forsaken her. The heavy weight on her heart seemed to keep it from rising to God. Thoughts and words were both wanting. She could only plod on with a sense of unspeakable misery, and murmur, as she looked at a picture of the Blessed Virgin at the foot of the Cross, which was in her room, "Jesus, mercy! Mary, pray for me!" She tried to read, but could not fix her attention. The little act of kissing a Cross she always wore was, however, a tacit prayer. She could offer that up when all other effort was impossible. "It is a time," she said, in answer to Mrs. Nilson's question, "when nothing seems a help but simply clinging to the Cross."

"The Cross, not the Crucifix," ejaculated Mrs. Nilson.

"What is the Cross if our Lord is not upon it," Ita exclaimed. "Oh, I envy the poor peasants here their simple faith. It is dreadful to come suddenly on such a dark hour as this without knowing . . . ." She stopped short; she was beginuing to think aloud.

From where she was sitting, she could see Edgar. He seemed asleep; she went on tiptoe to see. Yes, he was dozing. She came back and told Mrs. Nilson that the aconite was taking effect. "Perhaps—perhaps he will be much better in a few hours," she exclaimed, with a sudden burst of hope.

"My dear Mrs. Derwent," Mrs. Nilson whispered, "I am so distressed at what you said just now. Allow me to improve the opportunity, which may not recur again, of asking you whether I am right in fearing that, although belonging to our pure Reformed Protestant Church, you hold some of the most grievous errors of Popery. Did you really mean that you envy the poor ignorant Papists?"

"Yes, I do, because they know what they believe, and we . . . . I, at least, do not."

"Oh! my dear Madam! how can you say so? Then it is evident that you have never found Jesus. You have never seized on His merits; never felt certain of your salvation through the atonement. You do not understand what it is to be justified by faith only, the glorious doctrine which Luther and all the Reformers preached."

"I know what Luther thought himself of the Reformation. A clergyman of our Church wrote down one day for me, what he called the Reformers' opinions of the Reformation. I copied it into this book."

Ita opened a drawer, and opening a Letts' diary,

which she carried about with her, showed Mrs. Nilson the following passages:

"'The world grows worse daily. It is evident that men are far more vindictive, more covetous, more destitute of all mercy, more immodest and unruly, and far worse than they were under the Papacy.'—*Luther, Sermon*, in Postill Evang. App., vol. i. Jena, 1600. Advent.

"'Formerly, when we were led astray by the Pope, men readily followed good works; but now all their aim is to get everything for themselves, by extortion, plunder, theft, falsehood, and usury.'—*Luther, Sermon.* 26 Dom. Post Trin.

"'All the waters of the Elbe would not yield me tears sufficient to weep for the miseries caused by the Reformation.'—*Melancthon, Epist.*, lib. iv., Ep. 100."[1]

Mrs. Nilson sighed deeply. "The opinions of men," she said, "were little to the purpose. Read the Bible, Mrs. Derwent, read it with prayer, and then you will know what to believe and you will be made free from the bondage of the law."

"We read the Bible every day, Edgar and I," Ita answered; "and we first say a prayer that we may understand it rightly."

"That, dear Madam, may be only a formal practice. The letter killeth, it is the spirit that gives life. It is impossible that anybody can read the Bible with a humble and devout spirit, and not come to a saving knowledge of the truth. The divine simplicity of the Gospel speaks for itself. Will you—will you read and pray till the light shines upon you?"

Ita was touched by the real earnestness of Mrs. Nilson's manner. She sighed, and said, "I could

[1] See "Innovations," a lecture delivered in the Assembly Rooms, Liverpool, April 23rd, 1868, by the Rev. R. F. Littledale, priest of the Church of England.

almost envy you also the firmness of your conviction —that your belief is the true one."

"You may attain to it, my dear young friend."

Ita shook her head, and replied, "There are truths, or rather duties, about which I do not yet see my way clearly. But I, too, have some convictions which I can never part with, and would rather die than lose."

Too harassed to carry on the conversation, she went again to the bed-room, whither her eyes had been continually wandering. Edgar was getting restless again. He awoke, and asked for water.

"Ought I to try and get him to take some nourishment?" she asked, coming back to the drawing-room.

"Some arrowroot, I should think, could do him no harm," Mrs. Nilson answered. "The only difficulty is that some fevers ought to be fed, and others starved."

What was Ita to do? She felt almost distracted. Edgar was beginning to be light-headed. His answers had not been quite coherent the last time she had spoken to him. Her transient hope, that the globules would work a cure, was passing away. By Mrs. Nilson's advice, she gave him, however, some more aconite, and made out from the book, that six hours afterwards something else might be administered with advantage.

"But in six hours he may be much worse," she said.

Antonia came in just then, and told her that Mr. Neville had called. She said she should like to see him, and informed Mrs. Nilson he was coming upstairs. If anything could have ruffled the mild placidity of that good woman's countenance, it would have been that announcement. She took off her spectacles, and moved to a chair near the window.

On second thoughts, Ita thought she would go and meet Mr. Neville on the stairs, and speak to him in the

dining-room. She told Antonia to sit in her husband's room, and fetch her if he called.

"How is Mr. Derwent?" Mr. Neville asked, as he met her.

She did not answer, but led the way into the dining-room. When they were there, she said, "I am afraid he is very ill, and I am almost out of my mind with perplexity, as to what I ought to do."

"About what?" he anxiously asked.

"About seeing an Italian doctor or not. Either way, I shall reproach myself. Mr. Neville, what do you advise me to do?"

"I suppose you are afraid of their mode of treatment."

"Yes—that terrible bleeding."

"What do you think is the matter with Mr. Derwent?"

"I think it is inflammation of the lungs. I have been giving him aconite globules, which Mrs. Nilson recommended. She is upstairs, but he would not see her. Now I fancy that he is not quite himself. It seemed to me, just now, that his mind wandered. I should like you to come into his room for a minute, only she would think . . . ."

"I can wait till she goes. I have nothing else to do."

"Thank you. I should be very glad, because, if we send for the doctor, you can speak to him for me about not bleeding him."

"Go, and do not think of me till you want me. I will sit here and say my office."

Ita thanked him again and went upstairs. She found Mrs. Nilson and Antonia whispering at the bedroom door. The former came to meet her.

"Antonia says that it is dreadful you do not see a doctor. She thinks he is getting worse. I dare say

it is no such thing. These sort of people are so easily alarmed. Do not look so frightened, dear Madam; but I really think the case is beyond our management, and that you had perhaps better send for Dr. Mandrossi. I am afraid I must go home now. Shall I tell them as I go down to fetch him?"

"Yes, if you please. Thank you so much for all your kindness."

"Shall I come and spend the night with you?"

"A thousand thanks; but Antonia and I can manage quite well, for this night, at any rate."

When Mrs. Nilson was gone, Ita went to tell Mr. Neville that she had sent for the doctor.

"I cannot tell you how it frightens me," she said, "after he so positively objected to it."

"I think you have done quite right."

"But if he comes and says there is danger, and he must bleed him, what *am* I to do if he says he will die without it?"

Mr. Neville did not answer for a moment.

"Advise me," she said, with the impatience of intense anxiety. He had the habit of raising his heart to God before giving advice, and in this case he particularly felt the need of prayer. It would have been cruel to refuse the counsel she asked, but to give it was assuming a kind of responsibility.

"My advice to you is this," he said: "if I were you, I would tell Dr. Mandrossi, who is, I have heard, a good and sensible man, how completely the practice of bleeding is given up in England, and that the physicians who have long known your husband's constitution, have particularly warned him against losing blood. If, when he hears this, he still persists that it is absolutely necessary to bleed him, I should say you must submit. I am supposing that Mr. Derwent is not in a state to decide the question himself. We

cannot do more than our best. We must ask our good and merciful God to direct us in a decision of this kind, and then act in the simplest manner, according to the circumstances in which we are placed, and which He has ordained. Then whatever the consequences may be, we shall be able to bear them."

These words quieted a little Ita's nervous agitation. "You have done me good," she said, "and now will you speak to the doctor when he comes, and then bring him upstairs?"

"Certainly."

Ita turned back as she was leaving the room. "Will you pray for me; I cannot pray myself. There seems a dark cloud between my soul and God. I scarcely know what religion I belong to. All is doubt and confusion. I can hardly utter a prayer."

"Try while you hold that little Cross in your hand . . . ."

"Oh yes, that is the only thing that helps me 'at all!'"

"Well, but try and say 'Passion of Jesus, strengthen me,' just those five words. Will you?"

"Yes; and now I will go and wait in his room."

Edgar had been much more ill for the last two or three days than either he or his wife had any idea of, and that evening he grew so much worse that, when the doctor came, he said he was in great danger. There was high fever and severe inflammation of the lungs. He said he would certainly, under the circumstances, have bled any ordinary patient, and that if, in twelve hours, an improvement did not take place, he should feel himself in duty bound to resort to it as the last chance of saving him. But he consented to try, first, the effects of other remedies, and left all the necessary directions for the night. Mr. Neville stayed

in the next room, and now and then she came to tell him how Edgar seemed. He was very agitated, almost delirious for some hours, but towards morning his breathing improved a little, and he dozed at times.

Towards five o'clock, just as light was dawning in a cloudless sky, Ita came out of the bed-room, and Edmund Neville was struck with the expression in her face. It was quite different from what it had been before. She said to him, "You must be very tired and cold, I am afraid?"

"Not at all," he answered; "do you think he is better?"

"I am not sure. He is sleeping just now. Antonia has just come in, and I will stay here a little while. Mr. Neville, what do you expect? Do you expect he will recover?"

"I hope so, yes; I think I may say I expect it."

"You do not know how dreadful it would be if I were to lose him now."

"I know, I know what misery it would be."

"No, you do not know what would make it so terrible. It would not be because I love him so much, or because, while other people have fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, I have only him, and that I should be quite alone in the world if he were to die. It is not that I mean. . . . ."

"It would be a great, an unspeakable sorrow," Mr. Neville answered. "But one suffering you would be spared, the worst of all—self-reproach. You would not have that torment."

"I should," she said in a voice which startled him. He waited for her to say more. She was hesitating whether she should disclose the thoughts that had been crowding into her mind during the silent hours of that long night.

When the doctor went away, and she remained

fully aware that Edgar was in a very dangerous, though not in a hopeless state, she had sat down by his bedside, and looked at him, and thought that perhaps this life, with all its hopes, its joys, and its love, was about to end, and that for both of them in that case there would be nothing real, nothing that would signify, but the world to come. The sufferings of thirty, forty, or even seventy years, seemed like nothing by the light of that prevision—nothing to that boundless space beyond these years on which he was, perhaps, about to enter. And at the same time with that light, an irresistible overwhelming consciousness filled her soul, not only that she utterly disbelieved all the illogical, far-fetched shifts and pretences of an unreal Catholicism, but that she had a positive and firm conviction that if there is a true Church and a true religion in the world, it is the Roman Catholic Church, and the Roman Catholic religion.

All the theories that she had tried so hard to accept, all the sophistry of an artificial Church system, all the delusions cherished against the daily evidence of their unreality, melted away like snow in the fiery light of one great, terrible fear. The passionate human affection which had kept her soul captive now took a new direction. It made her look on the question for her beloved one's sake and her own, as if they were both standing on the brink of eternity. Earthly suffering—even an earthly parting, those terrible spectres which had lately haunted her, lost their terrors in that hour. By Edgar's side, Edgar, who was, perhaps, dying, one thought alone was uppermost. Were they both in earnest? Could they both have stood before the judgment-seat of God and have declared they were sure—sure with the certainty of absolute faith—that the Anglican Church was that Church, or was united in faith with that one Church of which our Lord spoke

when He said, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it."

Perhaps he might. She looked at the Crucifix lying on his bed near his hand, and she felt that if God recalled him whilst still outside what she now, with a full conviction, believed to be the true Church of Christ, she could hope, she might trust that the error was involuntary, the delusion pardonable. But she? No, never again after that night could she plead ignorance before men or before God. The voice had been heard, the light seen, the veil of the Temple rent in twain, disclosing the holy of holies to her trembling gaze with awful distinctness. The very foundations of her soul were shaken, but a new power also imparted to it, a strength to welcome sufferings, if so be she might win by it on his death-bed, if God so willed it, or for his future life, if it was spared, the blessing contained, now she knew it, in those words: "The true faith."

Never had a greater change taken place in a woman's heart, and yet in one sense nothing was very different. Her love was the same, and her convictions much what they had been before that night—only both had risen higher than the hopes and fears of this world.

After the pause which had followed the utterance of her reply to Mr. Neville's words of comfort, she slowly and resolutely said, "If I had been honest, courageous, true to God and to myself, instead of weak and selfish in my blind love for him, who knows . . . . Oh, Mr. Neville, I can never, never forgive myself if Edgar should die not a Catholic!"

Edmund Neville looked at her with great surprise and emotion. "Are these feelings new ones?" he asked. "Have you been thinking for some time past differently from your husband?"

Ita burst into tears, and answered, "I have still a weak fear of telling you the truth, of saying what would make him miserable when he is so ill, dying, perhaps. But I know this is wrong. It must never be again with me as it has been. God has shown me this night that He will not be trifled with; that truth, when once seen, must not be resisted; that on my loved one may be visited my cowardly weakness. My greatest anguish, since the doctor said he was in great danger, has been that I hid from him my convictions."

"Then this is no sudden inspiration?"

"It is like a sudden light thrown on a dim colourless scene. I cannot tell you more at present. I must go back to him. But I am glad I have said this much —that I have secured myself against my own weakness. Whatever happens, whether by God's great mercy my beloved one recovers, or if I lose him . . . Oh, my God!"—she stopped a moment, pressing her hand on her heart—"I give you the right—I even wish you to promise, Mr. Neville, that you will remind me of what I have just said to you. There is nothing before me now, either way, but trials so great that nothing could exceed them, except *that* anguish I spoke of just now—the not having told him the truth. If he recovers, and you see me so happy that I might, perhaps, wish to think this had all been a dream, remind me of that anguish. Do not let me delude myself again. You are God's priest, and now you know that I am a Catholic in faith, heart, and desire, never let me deceive him; and pray, oh, pray, if he lives . . . ."

The sound of Antonia's voice calling her startled Ita, who rushed back to the bed-room.

Mr. Neville had sometimes thought she was nearer the Church than her husband, but he had never spoken to her about religion, and was astonished at this sudden disclosure of her feelings.

On the following day, Edgar was a little better. Dr. Mandrossi could not say he was out of danger, but he thought rather more hopefully of his case. The fever had abated, and he was quite himself again. He did not object to the attendance of the Italian physician, so long as he did not insist on bleeding him. A compromise was agreed upon—leeches applied and also a large blister. The succeeding night was bad, but there was some improvement on the next day.

Meanwhile, Ita nursed him with a heart divided between hope and fear, and a deep consciousness that the careless, joyous phase of her life was over. The future could never be like the past. She was very calm and composed, and when she came out of the sick-room to see Mr. Neville or Mrs. Nilson, who often called to inquire how Edgar was going on, she spoke to neither of them of religion. Her brief replies to the latter's well-meant exhortations to improve the season of affliction, convinced that lady that Mrs. Derwent was in an unconverted state, and her poor sick husband, it was to be feared, in no better condition.

One morning, two or three days after he had begun to improve, Edgar called his wife to his bed-side, and in a low voice, for the least exertion still brought on violent fits of coughing, and his weakness was very great, he said to her, "I do not know whether to ask to receive the Sacrament or not." A wild, unfounded hope crossed her mind, that perhaps in his illness a change had come over him also, and, with a beating heart, she knelt down by him, anxiously waiting for his next words. "But on the whole," he whispered, "I had rather not. You remember what the Lortons told us?"

Ita then recollected that Lady Emma had said that the year before, when Mr. Nilson was going to administer the Sacrament to a sick person, he had begun

by delivering a short discourse, in which he warned those present not to believe in the doctrine of the Real Presence, and to beware of Romish and Puseyite errors on that point.

Edgar looked anxiously into her face, and said, "I could not, you know, endure that sort of thing now. I had better content myself with spiritual communion."

Ita's heart sank within her. The momentary gleam of hope was past. There he was, still very ill, though better than he had been, and without spiritual consolations, without the help of any ministrations that he would accept, and within his reach were all the blessings the Catholic Church gives to her children, if only he could see it.

"Would you like," she asked, with a faltering voice, "to see Mr. Neville? He comes very often to inquire about you."

"No; I am too ill to see any one," he answered.

"You need not speak to him; but I thought, dearest, he might be, perhaps, a comfort to you as he is a priest."

"No; I am afraid of his speaking about his Church. I will not see him, but thank him for his kindness."

A few more days elapsed, and then all immediate danger was at an end, though Edgar remained so weak that Ita was very anxious as to the effects of this illness on his general health. One morning, after she had given him his breakfast, he asked if there were any letters for him. She tried to persuade him to put off looking at them, but he insisted on her fetching them. He sat propped up by pillows, his face looking so wan and white, now that the light shone fully into the room, that she was frightened at the alteration in his looks.

"Give me my spectacles," he said, as he broke the seal of one of the letters. He tried to read, but could

not discern a word. He laid down the glasses and the letter, and exclaimed, "It is as I feared. I cannot see at all to read. I am all but blind now."

Ita threw her arms round his neck, half-sitting on the bed, and said, "It is only just now, because you are so weak."

He turned his pale face towards her, and answered, "My own darling, I have long been prepared for this. You must not grieve about it," he added, as he felt a hot tear fall on his hand. He did not know all the anguish of the heart against which his head was resting.

"Read those letters," he said.

One of them she saw was from Mr. Roland. By taking them all up at once, and shifting her position, she managed to withdraw it from his sight. She read aloud one from his mother, with very little news or interest in it; and then opened one from Annie. It began by giving accurate details as to several matters of business connected with the parish, and then went on to describe the various improvements she was making in their house and garden. Glancing down the page, she saw the following passage:—

"Mr. Roland has given up his living. I may as well mention it, as everybody by this time knows it. I would not believe it till it actually happened. Of course they intend to turn Roman Catholics. He is gone to London, and Eliza and the baby also, I do not know where. I believe Lord Carsdale wishes to consult Edgar about the living, whom he shall give it to. There is a nephew of Mr. Pratt, whom he was thinking of—a very good man he says; but he is not of your way of thinking, so I suppose you would not like it."

Ita skipped the whole of this paragraph, and went on with what followed:—

"I do not want you to come back a day sooner than is good for Edgar, but I shall be very glad when you do return. Aunt Gerald gets more and more nervous and fidgety, and frets at your being so long away. If Mentone is doing Edgar good you must stay there; but I hate the very name of the place.

"Just say in your next letter if Edgar would like the new carpet in his study to be green: two different shades—a light sprig on a dark ground; or would he like blue better? You know I was determined to get rid of that hideous red thing, all covered with ink spots. I have bought a sewing-machine for you, and one for myself."

"Does not she say anything about the Rolands?" Edgar asked.

Ita hesitated.

"Tell me directly," he quickly said; "is it true what the Lortons told us?"

She had no option now but to read to him what Annie had said. She could not keep her voice steady, and as she finished burst into tears.

"It is dreadful," he murmured. "The betrayal of a sacred trust; the abandonment of such great hopes; the misery, the scandal . . . ."

"Oh, dearest Edgar, try not to think of it just now. You are getting so flushed; you will bring on a fit of coughing."

He was worse all that day. Towards evening he exclaimed, "I cannot understand that Roland should not have written to me. Common good feeling ought to have made him do so."

Then Ita thought it best to say that there were some other letters, and one from him amongst them.

"And why on earth did you keep it back?"

"I want you so much to be quiet."

"Nonsense, my love. Do you think I have thought of anything else all the afternoon?"

"That is just the reason. You will make yourself ill."

"Darling Ita, there is one point on which we must come to an understanding. I am blind, or very near it. You are my eyes—my second self, my sole reliance, my support. Even with the best intentions, you must never deceive me—never keep back anything from me. It would deprive me of a confidence which is everything to me now."

Ita opened Mr. Roland's letter, and, with as steady a voice as she could command, read as follows:—

"My dear Mr. Derwent,—The great kindness I have received at your hands, and my deep and sincere regard for you, impose on me the duty to inform you myself of what I know will grieve you, and put an end, I fear, to our friendly intercourse. I allude to my giving up the living of Bramblemoor with the intention of joining the Roman Catholic Church. It has not been, as you will easily believe, without a long and painful struggle that I have come to this determination. I may say with truth that, in some ways, it would have been easier to me to meet death than to have taken this step. But I think you will so far agree with me that when once a man is convinced that he cannot with a good conscience remain in the Church of England—that when he can no longer believe it to be the Church, or any portion of the visible Catholic Church of Christ—that at the cost of any sacrifice, he is bound to leave it.

"This I am about to do. I will not speak of the sufferings which this step involves. They are many and acute, but God will help us to bear them. My wife desires her kindest love to Mrs. Derwent. One

of the greatest trials of this moment is the separation from such friends as you and Ita have been to us.—Believe me most faithfully yours,

"T. ROLAND."

Edgar said nothing for a few instants. His compressed lips and the tension of his face showed he was making efforts to keep down emotion. Ita did not venture to make any remark. At last he said, "I wish I had not cared so much for that man! I respected and loved him more than anybody almost; but this act of his separates us altogether. Do not talk to me about them; it is too painful a subject. Give me a pen and paper. Oh, I forgot that I cannot see to write. Write for me—"

"DEAR ROLAND,—I am too ill to write myself. I dictate this to my wife. You forsake the Church of England; our friendship is at an end. I cannot keep up any intercourse with one who insults his spiritual mother and mine, and deserts her in her sorest need. The strongest affection I am capable of feeling could not survive such a blow. Except by chance, we shall not meet again in this world.

"E. DERWENT."

"What are you adding?" Edgar asked, as he observed that Ita was writing on.

"This," she said, looking up; "'Edgar is much better—quite out of danger.'"

"Anything else?"

"Yes; 'God bless you both.'"

Her husband answered nothing. She folded, sealed, and sent the letter.

CHAPTER XI.

It was full three weeks before Edgar could do more than get up for a few hours in the day, and sit by the window during the hours of warmth and sunshine, screened from the glare of the sea by a green curtain. But not even when his strength returned did his eyes improve much. He could not attempt to read or write; Ita did everything for him, and his dependence upon her was complete.

Mr. Neville came sometimes to see him, but they never talked of anything bordering on controversy; even with his wife he spoke less of religion than heretofore. She read to him, and played and sung to while away the time. He was very patient; never complained; but it was a stern sort of patience that seemed to deepen the natural reserve of his character.

He insisted on Ita's going out every day beyond the terrace walk of their garden, where she would have liked to remain within call. He knew that exercise was good for her, and was not sorry to be left sometimes to his own melancholy thoughts.

She always went in the same direction, through the old gateway into the Via Lunga, and then up the steps that lead to the parish church. Every day she prayed there a long time, as close as she could to the altar; in that great Presence which makes a Catholic church different from every other place in the world.

One evening, as she was coming out of San Michele, she saw Mr. Neville advancing towards her. She

went to meet him, and they sat down for a moment on the low wall above the Piazza.

"I am glad I have fallen in with you," he said; "for I have just been to wish your husband good-bye. I am going back to England to-morrow. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," she said, the colour rising in her cheeks, and her eyes fixed on the ground. "Yes, you can pray for me."

"I do so," he answered, "every day of my life. I have not forgotten the promise you required of me."

"Thank you," she said; "but there is no need of reminding me. What I felt that night I still feel; what I meant then I now mean. It was not a burst of excited feelings, of transient enthusiasm."

"I was afraid it might be. You have quite made up your mind then to act up to your convictions."

"Quite; I have not wavered about it once since the day when Edgar was so ill. There is a passage in Dr. Newman's book, 'Loss and Gain,' which I often think of now. He speaks of the deep peace and serenity of mind of a person who has been received into the Catholic Church, and he says that it is like the stillness which almost sensibly affects the ears when a bell which has been long tolling stops, or when a vessel, after much tossing at sea, finds itself in harbour, and that it throws one back on the memory of one's earliest years; that it is as if one was really beginning life again. But that the happiness of childhood is nothing to it. I already begin to understand this. Is it not strange, Mr. Neville, that any one can feel as happy as I do since I took that resolution, and yet suffer so terribly?"

"About your husband, you mean?"

"Yes, that part of it is worse than death. I cannot conceive how I can bear it; sometimes the aching of

my heart is so acute when I think of the suffering I shall cause him, that I almost expect it will really break."

There was a moment of silence, and then Mr. Neville said, "It is seldom that such peace as you spoke of just now is felt before the final step is taken. Before people are actually received into the Church I have often observed that up to the last moment they suffer very much, and are still full of doubt and agitation. As a rule, peace comes afterwards."

"I suppose God gives me this peace and this joy in believing, because He knows how great my suffering is; and then also, perhaps, because my mind is so entirely made up. I would ask to be instantly received into the Church if it was not that at this moment Edgar is so weak, that any agitation might bring on a relapse. I have been thinking what I had better do. He depends, you know, so entirely upon me. If, when we are in England, and I have taken the final step, he should think it right . . . . he is very much in earnest . . . . He thinks it, you know, a very wicked thing to leave the Church of England . . . ." She stopped, and then added, conveying without expressing her thought, "Annie would be near him."

Mr. Neville was deeply moved. The words of our Lord came into his mind—I have not found so great faith not in Israel." There was something very touching in that calm, courageous resolution to do what was right, come what would of it, and the clear appreciation of a terrible, impending trial, in a person of Ita's character, and as yet unsupported by the strength to be found in the Church.

It was impossible to look at her and to have seen and watched her during her husband's illness, and not to have been struck by the feminine tenderness and childlike sweetness of her nature and her intense

affection for him. But her resolution was inflexible, because with the spirit of a martyr, though she might writhe under the agony of giving him pain, and shudder at the thought of being banished from his side, she would not shrink from paying the price she had offered when he was in danger of death, to obtain for him the gift of faith.

"You are a valiant woman," Mr. Neville said, pressing her hand as he rose to take leave of her. "To those whom God calls to make great sacrifices, He gives when they are true to Him more than common courage."

A sweet smile passed over Ita's face as she answered, "I am as weak as water, but too great a coward to dare to trifle with God's mercies. I wonder when and where we shall meet again. Give me your blessing."

Mr. Neville blessed her, and said, "I suppose all you have said to me on this subject is strictly confidential?"

"Yes," she replied. "I should not wish any one to know of it before I can tell Edgar."

Then, after shaking hands, they walked away in different directions.

As Ita was descending the steps again, and about to turn into the street, she passed a woman walking on crutches, whose appearance attracted her attention. She was dressed in black, and had on a plain white cap. Her face was very pale, but its expression so calm and sweet, that she could not help stopping to look at her. There was something at once serene and melancholy in her large dark grey eyes and gentle-looking mouth. Her hair was quite grey, though she did not seem very old—not more than fory-five or forty-six, apparently. Ita thought she was coming up the steps, and drew back, as if to make room for her,

but the lame woman shook her head with a smile, which seemed to imply that she would have liked to have gone that way if she could, and then she walked down the street, and through the archway towards the Via di Bréa.

Ita was suddenly possessed with the idea that this might be the woman whom she had heard of from the priest at Colla, who had lost her child in a shipwreck, and whom she had so much wished to see. Edgar's illness had driven the subject in a great measure out of her mind—at any rate, prevented her from making any inquiries about her. She looked at her watch, and seeing that it was yet more than half an hour before the time when she would be expected at home, she followed the person who had engaged her attention to the Church of the Black Penitents, as the old Franciscan church is now called. She saw her kneeling, with her crutches laid by her side, in an attitude of profound devotion, quite motionless, as if she saw and heard nothing about her. Ita was obliged to come away before she had made the slightest movement. Her whole being seemed absorbed in prayer.

All the evening, even whilst she was reading to her husband, the thought of this woman was running in Ita's head. And the next day, when she went out walking, she stopped at the Abate Giovanni's house, whom she met just coming out.

"Ah, bravo!" he exclaimed, when he saw her. "Then the Signore Derwent is much better, as the Signorina can leave him."

"Yes," she answered, in Italian; "he is much better, and he insists on my taking a walk every day."

"He does right," the Abate answered; "and now we have got, at last, fine weather again."

After a little more conversation about Edgar's illness, Ita said, "Can you tell me the name of a person

dressed in black, with a white cap, who walks on crutches, whom I met yesterday in this street?"

"An elderly woman?"

"Not very old, but with grey hair, and a very nice, pleasing face."

"Oh, yes—*poverina!* Her name is Mariana. She is very poor, very good, and always praying. Some people say she is not quite right *here*," he added, touching his forehead; "but I wish we were all as mad as she is, if we were one-half so good. I do not think she has ever been mad at all; but the loss of her child, and a fright and a blow on the head in an accident at sea, a great many years ago, when she was coming from Florence, where her husband died, made her lose her memory, and she has never quite recovered it since. She wanted to see you, but I told her not to trouble you. She has not been to your house, has she?"

"Oh, no! I never saw her till I noticed her in the street yesterday."

"Ah, I thought not. She is so good and obedient."

"But I should like to know her. Where does she live?"

"Here, in the Via Lunga; the last house but one to the left, near the gateway. Take care how you go down the stairs. It is so dark till you get to the landing place."

Ita determined to go there at once. She felt a little nervous, but very anxious to talk to Mariana—to examine her features, and to hear as much as she could recollect or tell of the circumstances attending the loss of her child. She might say something that would put it out of the question that she herself could be that child; and Ita could not but feel that this would be a relief, though at the same time she could not have been contented to have put away the idea of

such a possibility without having examined into it. She went, therefore, straight to the door the Abate had pointed out, and groped down a very dark staircase.

When she got to the bottom, she called out, two or three times, "Mariana!" and soon heard the sound of crutches. The door opened, and the lame woman appeared. She smiled as she recognized the lady who had offered to let her pass the evening before, and invited her into her very small, but clean and cheerful room. All the furniture in it consisted of a poor pallet, a chair, and an *alterino*, on which were spread out her little devout treasures. She placed the chair for her visitor, and sat herself on the edge of her wretched bed. Ita made some remark in Mentonese, at which Mariana seemed surprised.

"So, you speak our language," she said. "So much the better, Signorina. But, do you know, I had almost forgotten it when I came back here last year; for so many years I spoke nothing but Italian."

"And where have you been so long away? Are you not a Mentonese?"

"Yes; but I married very young, and went to Florence with my poor husband, and we lived there till a fever carried him off, about two years after we married."

"And then . . . ."

"Then I have been many, many years in a hospital at Genoa, with the good nuns. I was for some time out of my mind. My head was so bad. When I spoke, people said I talked nonsense, and perhaps I did. I am never sure even now whether I am dreaming or remembering, but the good God knows. I am like poor Gian, the dear good idiot boy, who is always in the churches. But people are kinder to me than to him. Everybody is good to me."

"You have had great sorrows?" Ita said, gently taking her hand.

"Truly I have!" Mariana answered, and she looked at the sea in an earnest, wistful manner. "First, I lost my husband. Lorenzo died—he was a good youth. I am sure he is in Paradise! Happy him! poor me! I was coming home with my bambina—the prettiest creature, Signora! The English lady who was in the ship with us used to stroke her cheek, and say, 'Cosi vezzosa!' She did not know much Italian, but she always said that 'Cosi vezzosa!' She had a baby also, but not so fine a child as mine. She was as good a Signora as ever lived, that English lady. She gave me some of her child's own clothes for my bambina. The night before the accident she herself put a clean night-gown on the creatura . . . ."

Mariana stopped. Her mind was wandering back to the past, and seemed for a moment abstracted.

Ita was looking at her intently, wondering whether some secret instinct would speak to her heart, if by some strange possibility this was her mother. "And what happened that night?" she gently asked.

"Who knows?" Mariana answered. "I had a dream about it once, after I had been a long time in the hospital. When first I was there I was always asking for the bambina, and they told me that if I had ever had one she was drowned in the sea, for that the ship I was in had struck against another in the dark, and that almost everybody had been lost; but I could not remember anything about it. The last thing I recollected was the English lady putting the night-gown on the bambina. But one night as I was lying awake in my bed near the window, looking at the sea—but perhaps I was asleep and dreaming, I am not sure—I fancied I was standing at the top of a ladder and a great noise going on around me, and people screaming;

and then I thought I gave the bambina to somebody who was holding out his arms. It all passed through my mind, just as if it was happening then, and I was very ill again afterwards, for I do not know how long. At last I got better, but I did not wish to leave the hospital, and the sisters were glad to keep me. I helped them to nurse the other patients. They thought I was not quite right in the head, because I forgot things. Not what I had to do in the hospital, but things that had happened before I came there. I could not tell them the name of Lorenzo's father, or they would have written to him. I did not want to come back to Mentone without Lorenzo or the bambina. I liked better to stay with them. They were so good, and there is such a beautiful chapel where I could always go when they did not want me. But when the sisters were sent away I had to leave too."

Ita had been eagerly listening to every word Mariana uttered, and thoughts were crossing her mind with the rapidity of lightning. Was it Piombo who had received Mariana's child into his arms? Was the scene she had described a sudden return of memory recalling what had really happened, or a mere dream, or a hallucination. As far as she had ever heard it was in a boat drifting at the mercy of the waves, that she had been found lying. The paper at the villa said so, and she remembered sitting on Mr. Hendon's knees, and hearing him say to Lady Emily, "You should have called her Moisina."

"And you used to sit by the side of your poor little baby's cradle and sing her to sleep?" she said to Mariana, thinking this picture might awaken latent recollections, and she was not mistaken.

A faint colour rose in the poor woman's cheek, and she answered, "These poor arms were her only cradle.

She never left my bosom till I gave her into those other arms that took her away. I hope she is with God in Paradise. But, O Santissima Madre! if she is on earth, let me see her before I die."

Ita could not restrain her tears, and raised the thin, wan hand she held to her lips. Still she did not feel what she thought she ought to feel, considering the possibility which she was mentally contemplating.

"How do you live, dear Mariana?" she asked, after a pause. "Who takes care of you?"

"Good souls," she answered, with her sweet smile. "One gives me a penny, another a bit of bread. Shia Teresina bought me this black gown. I can do a little needle-work and earn something that way. I want very little."

"You know the priest at Colla? You went there last summer?"

"Yes; when I came back to Mentone they told me that the English lady who used to live here had adopted a child, who had been found by one Giovanni Piombo, of Spedaletti. I thought, Signora, that perhaps she might be my daughter; but the man was dead, and the lady gone away to her own country. Then this winter people said that the Signorina was here, that she was married, and I wanted to see her. I felt as if I should know at once if she was my Lucia. But Pré Gian said I was not to think of it. That it could never be proved, and a poor foolish creature like me should not go and trouble a lady with my mad fancies. Pazienza, he is a good, holy man, and he knows best. If I was sure she was my child, I would not say so. I should only look at her as she walked by, and perhaps kiss her hand, as I would any other lady's. If only I could know that the *creatura* was in Paradise, or a good Christian if she is alive! Jesus and His Holy Mother bless her!"

Ita hesitated whether she should tell her or not that she was Lady Emily's adopted daughter, but she put off, at all events for that day, doing so. "Was it in that accident that you received the injury that has made you lame?" she asked.

"The sisters said so. They thought I must have hurt my hip as well as my head. I was taken out of the water quite insensible."

"Have you any relations here?"

"No; I was an orphan and an only child. I had an uncle, but he is dead. Everybody here thought I was dead too. And so they did at Florence, I believe. When I came here, they called me the Ghost, and then the Pazzarella."

"And now the Santarella," Ita said, fondly stroking her hand.

Mariana smiled. "That is the worst mistake of all," she said.

Ita glanced round the room to see what would be the most acceptable present she could make to Mariana. It struck her that there was nothing scarcely but a straw mattress on the poor bedstead.

"Do you not want a coverlet and some sheets?" she asked.

"There are other poor creatures that want them more than I do," was the answer.

"But none to whom I should so much like to give them," Ita replied, caressingly.

Mariana drew her to herself and kissed her with that simplicity which belongs to the poorer class in Italy. Ita thought as she returned the embrace how terrible, in many cases, would be the idea of a mother in that rank of life; but there was in Mariana a gentleness and a refinement which prevented that feeling. But at the same time she could not at all realize the possibility of the fact, or experience any of the emotion

which the slightest doubt on the subject she thought ought to produce.

Before going away, she tried to discover the date of the accident, which had been so fatal to the poor woman, and the name of the hospital at Genoa where she had spent so many years. But it was difficult to get any definite answers from her as to those points. She seemed to have forgotten her own age, and the names of almost all the persons she had known. Her mind had retained certain images and recollections, but there was no sequence in her ideas.

"Where have you been to-day, little woman?" Edgar asked when his wife came in.

"To see a poor person," she answered, and then, after a little hesitation, added, "the person I heard of at Colla. I have found her out."

"Well, and what is she like?" he asked with a smile, which showed how little importance he attached to her surmises.

"She is a very nice woman—almost a saint, the Abate Giovanni says, but I do not feel at all as if she could be my mother."

"I should think not, you silly child. Has she not partly lost her memory? I dare say the whole story is an imagination."

"No, I do not think that," Ita answered; and as she was taking off her bonnet, and standing before the glass, she said, half to herself, "I do not think I am at all like her."

Edgar laughed.

"But you know, dearest, there is just a possibility, and I must try and do something for her. I could not be happy without."

Edgar threw his arm round his wife as she leant against his chair, and said, "By all means. But do not get what the French call an *idée fixe* on the subject."

"Oh no, indeed. I really do not feel as much as I fancy I ought to do about it; only I am so sorry for her, and in a peculiar way, because of her having had that sort of sorrow. I am going to ask Antonia to come with me into the lumber-room."

"Is there such a place in the house?"

"Yes; all sorts of things used to be stowed away there. I have not been into it yet. I think I may find there things which we shall never want that I can give to Mariana—that is her name. May I do what I like about that?"

"Certainly; and let me know, too, if there are any things that you wish to take to England, that we may consider how to send them; for I warn you that I expect soon to be well enough to go home. And I do not want to stay here a day longer than I can help," he added to himself.

This announcement produced a number of conflicting feelings in Ita's heart. Joy that he thought himself getting well; dread of the long journey; fear of what must happen when she returned to England, joined to the desire for it, a desire growing every day more like the thirst of the hart panting after the water-springs.

She made no comments on his remark, but said she would proceed at once to the lumber-room with Antonia. She wanted to find out if there was any spare bedding. Not much to her companion's satisfaction, she seized upon a blanket and a bed quilt which she said would serve her purpose, and insisted that a pair of sheets should be added to them, and the whole made into a parcel. There was one large box in a corner of the room, which she proceeded to examine. It contained a variety of the sort of articles that grow out of use in a house in the course of some years. Worn-out table-covers, old cushions, pieces of

unfinished canvas-work, faded balls of worsted, sundry copy-books, some of her own old toys, a backgammon-board, a box of ivory chessmen. At the bottom of the case was a rather large parcel, half tied up in brown paper which Ita drew out and began undoing. "Do you know what this is?" she asked Antonia.

"Yes, yes," the old woman said, looking a little embarrassed. "I remember, Miladi ordered me to put that parcel by—at the time when the Signorina was brought here."

"When *I* came here, do you mean?"

"Yes, Signora. She told me it was the clothes the Signorina had on when Il Piombo found her."

Ita's heart beat very fast. She wished to open the parcel alone. So leaving Antonia to make up the one she intended for Mariana, she took the other to her bed-room, where she locked herself in, and then with trembling fingers cut the string, and unfolded the contents. There was a red shawl with a blue and black border and a child's flannel gown, night-gown, and night-cap. On these she saw the initials *A. D.* It is difficult to describe the emotion with which she looked at these things grown quite yellow with time, and on those letters, which seemed a connecting-link with those to whom she owed her birth. She might never know more than she did then; but there were the initials A. D. They were something to think of, to dream about. Her impulse was at once to take those things to Mariana and find out if she recognized them. If she did—if they were the clothes her child had on at the time of the accident . . . . There could be no doubt then of her identity; though, indeed, she might only fancy they were the same. Her memory was evidently not to be relied upon. Ita was ashamed and vexed to feel how much she dreaded to discover the truth. She hesitated whether she should, in the

first instance, show the clothes and initials to Edgar. But the dinner-bell was ringing; there was no time for it at that moment, and she was afraid that it would over-excite him to talk about it in the evening. It might prevent his sleeping. There was nothing to be done till the next day; but it was very difficult not to be silent and abstracted. Edgar remarked, once or twice, that she was not attending to what he said, and playfully reproached her for it. He was in better spirits than usual. With the eager longing for change which often follows a severe illness, he was looking forward to their homeward journey. Ita wished him to stay till April, as the doctor advised; but he wanted to go sooner. It was then about the middle of March.

After dinner he asked her to play to him. This was a positive relief. She could think while her hands were running over the keys, or drawing from them sounds more than ordinarily expressive, for the excited feelings which were flushing her cheeks, and making her heart beat, seemed to influence her playing. Thoughts came one after another into her mind in quick succession. She recollected what, at the first moment she had seen the clothes had not struck her, and that was, that Mariana had said that the English lady, on board the ship with her, had given to her child some of her own baby's clothes. There was an equal chance then of her being one or the other of those two infants. Involuntarily she inclined to the supposition that she was the unknown lady's child. Her fancy conjured up the image of the young mother who used to caress Mariana's baby, and say, "Cosi vezzosa," and she worked herself up into a belief that that must have been her mother. The shawl in which she had been wrapt up had evidently been a valuable one—more valuable than a poor woman could have

possessed. After all, that shawl might possibly be identified. The initials A. D. would also be a clue. "A. D.," she repeated to herself two or three times, and then the name Annie Derwent came into her mind, without, at first, awakening any particular idea.

She had never heard anything about Annie's parents, except that they had been drowned on the coast of Italy; that she was saved, and that Mrs. Gerald had brought her up. She did not even know where the accident had happened. She thought it was near Nice, where she knew Annie had lived with her aunt when she was a little child. She played on, and thought on; and the initials, and Annie's name, kept running in her head. And then, naturally enough, Holmwood also. Her first acquaintance with it, and with Annie, and then the day they had gone over the house and looked into Mrs. Gerald's room, and at the picture of Annie's mother—its likeness to herself. . . . Mrs. Gerald's violent emotion when she saw her dressed like that picture. . . . her strange capricious behaviour to herself. . . .

"Why do you stop playing?" Edgar asked. "Go on, if you are not tired, darling."

"I shall soon come back," she said, and throwing a shawl over her head, she went out on the terrace, feeling that she must be alone for a moment. That she must pursue this new strange bewildering thought, and put together the evidence that was rushing on her mind. It caused her a strange sensation, that seemed to thrill through her from head to foot. It was such a startling possibility. It almost seemed wrong to think of it—for if . . . . if she was the real Annie Derwent, she ought to be where Annie was. But it could not be. No; it was impossible. How could she even think of such a thing. And yet it would account so exactly for that likeness and for Mrs. Gerald's manner to her.

And then, that Mrs. Dallas writing to the priest at Colla for particulars respecting dates and initials. That might be a feigned name. She remembered that Mrs. Gerald had asked her, before she was married, the village where she had lived when she was a little child, and what town it was near? Then came the remembrance that she had always thought Annie like the girls of Mentone. She had told her so the first day they had met. If there was anything in all this, Annie was perhaps Mariana's daughter. The more she put together these surmises, the greater grew her agitation; for there was the shawl. If Mrs. Gerald saw that shawl, possibly she might know it again. But perhaps it ought never to be shown to her. Perhaps she ought never to breathe to any human being that this idea had come into her head. Yes; she must tell Edgar. And yet it would put him in a difficult position. She did not know if he had ever heard of her likeness to Mrs. Derwent's picture. She should hardly like to tell even him that she had conceived this idea, and was secretly dwelling on it. There were questions she longed to ask him, and indirectly, even that evening, if she managed well, she thought she might lead him to talk of Annie's parents, without giving him any notion of what she was thinking of.

She went back to the pianoforte, and played a little longer. Then after tea was brought in, she took up her work, and sat down by him. She spoke of several things one after another, and at last mentioning Nice, she said, in an apparently careless manner, though her heart was beating fast, and her mouth quivering with nervousness—

"Was it not near Nice that Annie's parents were drowned?"

"No; near the Gulf of Genoa?" he answered.

There was a pause, and then she asked—

"Is Annie like what her father was?"

"I do not remember him well enough to say. I was very young when he died."

"Did you ever see her mother?"

"No; not that I know of."

"Then Annie has not known her parents any more than I have mine?"

"No; not to remember them. She was only a few months old when they were drowned."

"How was she saved?"

"A sailor, I believe, swam with her to the shore. Now, love, will you read the article on the Eastern Liturgies in the 'Christian Remembrancer'—the number the Lortons left here?"

She read, but every minute seemed an hour; she longed intensely for the silence of the night; and when that was come, and she was lying awake restless, but fearing to move lest she should awaken Edgar, she longed as intensely for daylight and for morning; and, when she was up, and at breakfast, it seemed as if it would never be over. Edgar was not looking well. It was a pouring wet day, and this always told upon him. He complained of headache, and seemed disinclined to talk. It was impossible, she felt, to bring forward then a subject which, though he was always kind when she touched upon it, was not an agreeable one. Her unknown birth and parentage were not a trial to him, but any question of a discovery on that point he evidently shrank from. She would have liked to have shown him the things, and drawn his attention to the initials. If he did not make any remark, and did not seem struck with the coincidence, she would say nothing more, and try not to think about it. But he had lain down on the sofa with his eyes closed, and she felt that was not the moment to force upon him this conversation.

Ought she to pay Mariana another visit, and should she show her the clothes? She was not sure if it was prudent, but the impulse was too strong, she could not resist it. When, therefore, her usual hour for going out had arrived, she sallied out in her water-proof cloak, and with a large umbrella, carrying under her arm that strange parcel, which had become to her as a portion of her life, and a boy following her with the larger one, which contained her presents to Mariana. She felt almost as if she should faint when she reached the bottom of the stairs, and opened her door; but the poor woman's kind smile and gentle greeting quieted her agitation. She sat down by her side, took the bundle from the boy, and sent him away. When she undid it, Mariana said it was too much—the things were too good for a *poverella* like her.

"May God reward you!" she added, fixing her large grey eyes on Ita with a look of grateful affection.

"Were they like Annie's eyes?" Ita asked herself. She was not certain, the expression was so different. There was the same sudden lighting up in them when she smiled, but that is so often seen in Italian faces that it did not tell much. She could not make sure there was any likeness. Something there was in the shape of the face, perhaps a little alike. At last she took courage, and trying to speak without betraying emotion, she said, "I want you to look at these things which I have brought with me. I want you to tell me if they are like those your poor little child had on at the time of the accident. Look at that mark."

Mariana's lips quivered; her hand trembled as she took hold of the little thin yellow garment; large tears fell from her eyes upon it.

"This is my bambina's night-gown," she said, pressing it to her heart, "the one the Signora gave to her. Is she alive? Where is she?"

Ita, with flushed cheeks and dimmed eyes, answered, "I do not know, dear Mariana; nor do I know if we can ever find out. Listen to me. I want you to attend very much to what I am going to say."

"May the Blessed Virgin help me to do so," Mariana replied; and then, pressing the night-gown to her lips, she kept exclaiming, "bambina mia! figlia mia! così cara—così vezzosa!"

Ita almost despaired of fixing her attention.

"Mariana mia," she said, "do you remember the name of the lady who gave this night-gown and her other clothes to your bambina?"

"Oh no! Signora, I remember nothing—and names least of all."

"But you remember these letters," she said, pointing to the initials.

"Yes, yes," Mariana repeated, still kissing the little night-gown.

"Do you remember this shawl?" Ita asked, much agitated, for the answer might have confirmed or destroyed her own surmise.

Mariana looked at it, and shook her head. "No, Signora. No, I do not remember that shawl."

"Was your bambina wrapt up in a shawl when you gave her to the man who took her away?"

Mariana pressed her hand to her forehead. "Perhaps; I cannot tell; my head gets confused when I try to think. I remember a number of people pushing by me, and screaming fearfully. They were trying to get into a boat, and then there was a cry that it was sinking, and they pushed up the ladder, and scrambled back into the ship."

"Did the boat go down?" Ita anxiously asked.

Mariana sighed. "I do not know, Signora. It all seems to me like a dream. But oh, where did you get this night-gown?"

"It was wrapped up in a parcel with that shawl, and these other things."

"And where did you find the parcel?"

Ita hesitated a little, and then she said, "They belonged, Mariana, to the child the English lady you spoke of adopted—the baby Giovanni Piombo found at sea."

"Then she is my Lucia!" Mariana exclaimed, seizing the night-gown and pressing it to her heart.

"Listen to me," Ita said. "Listen to me quietly, dear Mariana."

"How can I be quiet?" the poor woman exclaimed, with some wildness in her manner. But while Ita was looking at her anxiously, she saw a change come over her face, and heard her murmur, "My good God, I will be quiet. Help me—I am a poor creature. Give me grace to wish for nothing but that Thy holy will should be done;" and then taking Ita's hand between both hers, she said, "Speak now, Signora."

Trying hard herself to command her feelings, Ita began in a slow and as distinct a way as she could to explain to Mariana that her child and the English lady's child must have both been lost the same night; that both of them must have worn night-gowns marked A. D., but," she added, her voice trembling as she spoke, "this shawl in which was wrapped up the child whom Giovanni Piombo found, seems more likely to have belonged to the English lady than to you."

"Ah, yes!" Mariana exclaimed sadly, "I never could have had such a shawl as that. Then I suppose my Lucia was drowned. The other child I mean? You have never heard of her?"

Ita was silent for a minute, and then she said, "I know nothing about her, but *if*, *if* I were ever to find out that she was alive, and where she was, and *if* she was happy and a great lady—such things have happened sometimes—would you wish me . . . ."

"Oh no, do not speak to her of the poor Mariana; she would not be glad to hear of her. But if you ever find my child, tell me that she is alive and happy, or write to Prè Gian to say so, and if she should come to Mentone, let me know of it, that I may watch for her and see her pass along the street and see her face before I die. And when I am dead, then you can tell her that there was a poor woman called Mariana, who had lost her daughter Lucia when she was a baby, and who prayed for her, that rich lady, night and day . . . . because the good Jesus had put it into her heart to do so. But if, when you find her, my child is poor and afflicted, and has no one to care for her, then send her to me, my beautiful treasure, and I will beg for her and love her as no one else can do."

Ita knelt down by the side of the poor woman, who possibly was her mother—possibly Annie's mother, at any rate a childless mother and a very forlorn one—and throwing her arms round her neck, tenderly embraced her.

Mariana suddenly asked her, "Are you, Signora, the child the English lady here adopted?"

Ita hesitated an instant, and then said she was.

Mariana did not utter a word, but changed colour.

Ita looked up, and said, "Am I like any one you remember;" her bonnet was thrown back, and her eyes, her soft beautiful eyes were fixed on Mariana.

"You are very like an angel," the poor woman said, "but not like any one else I can think of."

Ita was disappointed.

"Prè Gian said I was not to trouble you with my foolish ideas, or else now I know that you are the Signora at the villa . . . ."

"But Prè Gian did not know I should come and speak to you myself, and show you these things. What did you wish to say?"

"I was thinking that my Lucia had on her little shoulder the mark of an accident, which she met with when she was three months old, and which the doctors said would always remain, a terrible deep cut. If I could see .... only .... Oh no .... forgive me; you know if it was so, no one but you and I would ever know .... but I ought not to have asked."

Ita had turned pale. If the mark did exist, however faint the trace might be (and it might have escaped her notice and that of others) a doubt could hardly remain. But this time she did not hesitate—her gown was opened—her muslin habit shirt removed. "Look," she said to Mariana, her heart beating violently.

Mariana gazed intently on the white ivory shoulder, and then said gently, "It is not there;" and in a moment she added, as if the idea had slowly come into her mind, "then I think you must be the English lady's child."

The colour rushed into Ita's face. "But you do not see in me any likeness to her?"

Mariana paused, looking somewhat bewildered. "I cannot remember her face," she said at last; "I know her voice was very sweet and so is yours, and she was good and so are you." Then, once more, turning to the little night-gown, as if there was a connection between it and her lost child, she asked if she might keep it.

Ita felt grieved. It went to her heart to refuse the request; but she could not part with one of the most important relics of her infancy. Taking a little cross from her neck, she put it into Mariana's hand, and said, "I must ask you, cara, to accept this instead, and when you look at it, pray for me."

Her heart was very full. She feared Mariana looked fatigued and overwrought. She feared having said too much or too little. Still she did not see how

she could have avoided it, except by not speaking to her on the subject at all. Anyhow, she longed to be alone and think over what had passed between them. So, taking a most kind leave of her, she went up the dark stairs, and found on reaching the street that the rain had ceased. There was even a gleam of sunshine.

As she recapitulated on her way home, the result of Mariana's incomplete recollections, it seemed on the whole, at all events, very improbable that she should be her daughter. The mark on the shoulder might, no doubt, have disappeared, and she might have forgotten the red shawl, or somebody else might have wrapped her up in it; but all the probabilities were on the other side, and that other side in consequence, assumed in her mind more and more importance. Mariana would hardly have imagined what she had said about the boat, which a number of people had rushed into and then hastily escaped from. The boat supposed to have sunk might have been carried off by the waves, and it was not impossible she might have been accidentally left in it. As she had been found alone in a boat not very far from the spot, it was not an unlikely supposition that it might have been that very one.

How strange it would be, she thought, to go back to Holmwood and to see Mrs. Gerald and Annie again with this idea on her mind, this extraordinary surmise haunting her at every turn. Should she ever have the courage to speak of it to Edgar? Would he wish to pursue the inquiry? And that mark on the shoulder! if Annie should have it! But by this time it would probably be hardly perceptible even if it had ever existed. These doubts were almost more than she would be able to keep to herself, and yet she could hardly fancy mentioning them to her husband. At first sight it seemed such a wild supposition, and there

would be so much that would complicate all their relative positions. What would Mrs. Gerald feel if the suspicion crossed her, and had it perhaps crossed her, and would she ever open upon it to her or any one else?

It was fortunate for Ita that she had been inured from her earliest years to habits of silent reserve. It made it easier for her now to bear the trial of these oppressive secret thoughts.

When she came into the room Edgar said, "There are letters from England—one from Annie; read to me what she says."

Ita glanced anxiously over the closely-written sheet to see if there was anything meant for her alone, and then read aloud the following letter:—

"My DEAR ITA,—I am still very anxious about Edgar. At one time I was so miserable that I can hardly bear to think of it. Those horrid telegrams frightened me so. Once I almost lost all hope, and did not know what to do. Nobody gave me any comfort. I could not go those days to the Vicarage—I could not bear it. Now I have got your letter, and know all about it, I feel happier. The last telegram did, indeed, say he was out of danger; but then it left me in the dark as to what his actual state was. I am so afraid about his eyes. It is very bad not to be with him when he is so ill: but he has you. That is my comfort; I am sure you are a very good nurse, only too afraid of contradicting him, I think. (Edgar smiled, and Ita too.) I want to know what are your plans. If Edgar is well enough to travel, I suppose you will come home soon. How dreadful the doubt about the bleeding must have been! You were very courageous to withstand the doctor. You have more courage than I have—of one sort of courage, at least.

I am not so afraid of cows and wasps as you are. Edgar has just the wife I always wanted him to have. I should hate you if you were not such a dear, loving, perfect wife to him. I love you both very, very dearly.

"After I had received your last comforting letter, I went to the Vicarage and began again working in the garden. I am contriving something that will make Edgar's sitting-room very comfortable, and as you say his eyes are weaker since he has been ill, I am putting green blinds into all the rooms. It would amuse you to see how busy I am. Aunt Gerald has left off teasing me about paying visits and asking people here. I do not want to see anybody. Mrs. Sydney called last week. I told her that Mr. Neville had been very kind whilst Edgar was ill. She seemed very much pleased. She is a nice person, and I daresay Mr. Neville is a good sort of man, but I wish they were not Romanists, I dislike Roman Catholicism more than ever. I think part of Edgar's bad health is owing to fasting and all that sort of thing, and the bad air where he lived in London before he married. I never wish to go to London again, or ever to leave Holmwood. Edgar used to say in former days that I did not care for it enough. He could not say so now. Tell him I dote on every blade of grass in the park, and every cabbage in the kitchen-garden, and that I have taken root here as if I was myself a plant. I was reading the other day some lines of Cowper's. Yes, I sometimes read, though you would hardly believe it. I like his poems better than anybody else's.

> 'Time was when 'twas enough
> To fill the ambition of a private man,
> That Chatham's language was his mother tongue,
> And Wolf's great name compatriot with his own.'

These lines put such a ridiculous comparison into my

head: I thought it was enough to fill the ambition of a woman to have such a place as this, and such a Vicar in her parish as Edgar, not to speak of such a dear little Vicaress as you in the bargain. Dear me! I hope you will both be very happy when this letter reaches you!—Your affectionate cousin,

"ANNIE DERWENT."

"I am sure Edgar must have been dreadfully hurt and grieved about the Rolands. I cannot think of them with any patience. The blow, coming, too, just as he was beginning to be ill."

Ita saw this postscript in time to omit it.

Edgar said, "That dear good Annie! It does please me so much to hear of her increasing delight in Holmwood. I sometimes think that there are blessings we do not sufficiently dwell on. Suppose she had been poor, and you a rich heiress, how impossible it would have been that I should have given her up and married you; and how miserable we might all have been!"

He took his wife's small hand in his and raised it to his lips, saying at the same time, "My own little pearl of the sea!" These were favourite words of his, and they had always sounded like sweetest music in Ita's ears. They showed how he loved her all the more for her nameless birth; how he valued the unknown flower he had treasured in his heart. But now they seemed fraught with a very deep and serious import. However her own secret surmises might pursue the faint light which had dawned on the obscurity of her origin, what he had said a moment before seemed as if it must for ever seal her lips—yes, even to him. "How miserable we might all have been!" The words fixed themselves in her mind. She thought how miserable it might one day be in her power to make them

all if a further clue to the mystery was found! She recoiled from the very idea of such an act. But would it not also be very hard to go through life, shutting up in her own heart a suspicion which might possibly become a conviction. Would it be right never to tell Edgar of it? That was a grave question, and how was she to resolve it, for to no one but him could she whisper it. Yes, a day would soon come when, with entire security and a confidence deeper than that of any human friendship, she could seek light and guidance on that point. But when that day arrived, how would she and Edgar stand in regard to one another? That doubt was casting a dark shade over the whole of her future.

CHAPTER XII.

Edgar Derwent and his wife left Mentone towards the end of April, but did not arrive in England till the beginning of July. Their intention had been to spend only a fortnight on the way, and they had allowed, they thought, sufficient time for rest at different places. This was necessary for Edgar, who was still very weak, and the heat which had suddenly set in had tended to exhaust him. They resolved, in consequence of this premature summer, to cross the Alps, and to go home by Switzerland and the Rhine. They were warned that the first week in May was too early for the passage of the Splugen, but Edgar was bent on seeing that pass, and chose to assume that the year was an exceptional one. They stopped two or three days at Genoa, and Ita looked with a keen interest on the bay and the sea outside it, trying to picture to herself the scene on the night of the collision, which, twenty-three years ago, had suddenly sent

so many human beings into eternity, and amongst them those whom she was beginning secretly to think of as her parents.

She had never found courage to utter a word on that subject to her husband since the day that she had read to him the letter Annie had written after his illness, and heard his comments upon it. She did tell him of the things that she had found in the lumber-room at the villa, and mentioned that the clothes were marked with an A and a D.

"Indeed!" was all he said; and when she asked if he would like to see them, he begged her not to take the trouble of fetching them, in a tone which indicated he did not at all care about it; and, moreover, that the subject was not a particularly agreeable one. To a sensitive nature like hers, it was impossible to force it upon him. Some persons might have done so, and produced the things, and insisted on showing them to him, without waiting for encouragement. But this would have been simply impossible to Ita. She took refuge in silence, and with a heart feeling somewhat bruised and sore, laid at the bottom of her trunk the little parcel so precious to her, which he had not even thought it worth his while to look at. She did not ascribe this indifference to a want of affection on his part. She believed, and was right in believing, that he loved her deeply and ardently, but it was not in his character to enter into the feelings of others, and therefore without any fault of his own, he often gave pain where he did not intend it.

On another occasion she tried to lead him to speak of Mrs. Gerald. She described how wayward her conduct had always been towards her, and then timidly, and with a beating heart, related the scene which had taken place when Annie had dressed her like Mrs. Der-

went's picture. He answered that his aunt's temper had always been rather uncertain, but he was not surprised at her having been annoyed that day, for she never could bear the pictures in her room to be looked at or mentioned. It was thoughtless of Annie, who ought to have known this, to meddle with them; and then he changed the subject to what interested him much more, viz., an article in the "Guardian" on the use of incense in churches, and the answer to it he intended to write. After these two attempts she kept to herself every thought connected with the new surmise which was almost constantly in her mind.

At Milan they made another halt, and then having engaged a *voiturier*, performed their first day's journey to Chiavenna, the little town on the Italian side of the Alps, where travellers generally sleep before crossing the Splugen. It lies embosomed in a bower of Spanish chesnuts, and a beautiful waterfall dashes down the rocks at a short distance from the inn. They walked there and sat down on a bank near the emerald and purple pool, where the foaming waters lose themselves, watching the spray and enjoying the refreshing sound of the rushing flood.

"Look at that dog-rose!" Ita exclaimed, "is it not beautiful? it seems so fragile and delicate, with its pink flowers almost touching that boisterous torrent! Does it not bend over it as if in love with its fury and its joy. You remember Coleridge's lines about a waterfall?"

"Yes," Edgar replied; "and your thought might be turned into a poem, only you must say an eglantine, not a dog-rose."

"True; in this case the common name is not the prettiest. Generally it is so."

"But I cannot admire anything now on *this* side of the Alps," Edgar exclaimed. "I pine for the mountain

air; it seems as if a northern breeze would give me new life. I had rather be bathed in clouds than in sunshine just now."

Ita breathed an inaudible sigh; she had been assured that it was imprudent for a delicate person to cross the Alps so early in the year, but it had been impossible to dissuade him from it. He thirsted for the mountain air like a person in a fever for a draught of cold water. He saw that she looked pensive, and to dispel her anxiety said, "When I look at these snowy summits they seem to me the hills whence cometh my help."

Ita glanced at the sunny plain, the smiling villages, the deep blue sky of Italy, and the awful mountains rose before her like a vision of coming sorrow; but as usual, she acted by what was both with her an impulse and a principle, "never to give useless pain." It was too late to urge delay, so she smiled and said the beautiful sunset promised well for the next day, and seemed to share his delight at the thought of the morrow. It rose that morrow beautifully clear and bright, and in their open carriage the drive was delicious to the foot of the mountain, and winding through the umbraged roads perfumed with the blossoms of the Spanish chesnuts, they began the ascent; Edgar, in high spirits, enjoying every step of the way, and she sympathizing as usual with him with real genuine pleasure at first, but soon beginning to feel, with a sinking heart, after three or four hours' ascent, the increasing sharpness of the air, though the intense sunshine still mitigated its temperature.

They walked a little now and then, but when he returned to the carriage, she was always anxious lest he should not be wrapt up enough. Laughing sometimes, or a little impatiently, he rejected the cloaks she wished to add to his already warm coat. The dark

blue gentians and the lovely rose of the Alps now began to show their bright hues in the midst of the sparkling snow. Higher and higher, endlessly almost, the winding road seemed to lengthen, as they ascended; down far below them were lying the rich masses of foliage they had traversed that morning, and now they entered upon the regions of Alpine solitude. Then the clouds appeared, and gradually invaded the whole sky. Soon the air became so rarefied that Edgar began to cough, and as they turned the last corner before reaching the top of the pass, the weather completely changed—a cold piercing wind coming from the north, blew in their faces with a keenness that made Ita shiver, not with cold, but with fear.

"Cover your face," she exclaimed. "Edgar, cover your eyes, and let down the glasses." They pulled down the front part of the carriage, but through the ill-adjusted framework the wind made its way, and as they stopped at the refuge a wild hurricane was blowing, and snow beginning to fall. The horses were to rest there some time, and they got out. Through the passage of the rude inn a cutting blast made its way.

Edgar, when he sat down by the fire was looking white and coughing. He tried to talk cheerfully, but he felt as if the wind had gone through him, and when he went to the window to look at the wild scene, the sight of the snow hurt his eyes so much that he was obliged to shield them with his hand. He then consented to wear a shade, which he had rejected before. But when they set out again, and the weather improved a little, and they approached the Via Mala and the sources of the Rhine, he insisted on taking it off, and he would open the carriage. The sun was then shining and the air less cold, but no longer like the balmy breezes of Italy. Now and then through the

Alpine gullies a chilling wind came sweeping over the fir-trees or whistled among their branches; and there was more fury and less joy in that sound than in the roar of the torrent. Even the pretty châlets and the green meadows, speckled with cattle and dotted with flowers, though lovely in their way, had none of the glowing beauty of the fair towns and smiling scenery of the South.

They were too tired to push on that night, and slept at a small village hostelry at the foot of the mountain. A blazing fire of fir-branches greeted their arrival, and a supper of chamois and salmon-trout was soon provided for the tired travellers. But Edgar was too weary, and Ita too anxious, to eat. Before going to bed, he asked for some rose-water to bathe his eyes. He had not done so for several weeks—indeed, they had been so much better, that he had begun to read and write again a little.

"Do they pain you?" she asked.

"They burn like hot coals," he said; "but I dare say it is only the effect of the cold air. They will be better to-morrow."

The next morning he called his wife to his bedside. "My own love," he said, "I cannot see at all."

She trembled from head to foot, but answered, "It is only a cold." And when that day, and the next, and many more days passed, and the darkness settled on his eyes, and for the time being he was, to all intents and purposes, blind, she tried to cheer him by the words, "It is only a cold; it will not last."

They travelled on through Switzerland, and crossed the lakes of Wallenstadt and Zurich, and passed through scenes of wondrous beauty with something as like despair in their hearts as can be felt by those who, in the midst of deepest sorrow, believe in God, and cling to Him. He could not, and she would not,

look at the beauties of earth and sky. He held her hand almost constantly, and she hardly took her eyes off his pale face and sightless eyes. His deep depression, and the efforts he made to fight against it, told on his strength, and he seemed to grow weaker and weaker each day of that long, tedious journey, with its slow progress and long halts.

What an abyss there seemed between their first journey and the present one! Ita could hardly believe she was the same person that had travelled so joyfully by his side six or seven months before. Now, the sky, the trees, the flowers, seemed to insult her misery! Edgar was very good, very patient, but not generous—no, not generous—for he kept dwelling on her being his only hope, his only comfort, his only support—his eyes, his life, his heart. Sweet words, which might have stilled her anguish, and mixed even a strange joy with her trial, if they had been one in faith—if he had not once uttered that dreadful sentence, that he would separate from her if she became a Catholic. They kept ringing in her ears, giving an ominous and sad meaning to his words of reliance, trust, and endearment. The more she lavished upon him of tenderness and care, the more he reiterated what she felt to be adjurations never to obey the voice of conscience, never to cease to act a lie.

Oh, if she could have been blind instead of him! If she could be the helpless, the dependent one—close for ever her eyes to the light of day, and throw herself on his mercy! Then she would be free to plead her own cause, to claim her right to free action. She would not have feared to be blind if she had been a Catholic, and Edgar would still have cherished her. She could imagine a blessed life even with that dark veil between her and the light of day.

She would still hear the music of the wind, of the running streams, of the joyous birds, and, above all, that of his voice. The perfume of the flowers, the soft air in the summer, his gentle caresses, the delight of hearing him read, and the Church—the Catholic Church—pouring into her heart its treasures of consolation, of hope, and of holy melody; would not all that be happiness—would not that be a light more beautiful than that of day? She prayed ardently—prayed with a passionate desire that she might be blind and he might see, and sometimes almost persuaded herself her prayer would be heard.

As they were approaching Basle, on their way to Strasburg, where they were to embark on the Rhine, an idea suddenly entered her mind like a ray of hope. She had heard of a famous oculist at Heidelberg, Dr. ——, and she asked Edgar to stop there and consult him. He began by refusing. He preferred going straight to London, and seeing an English oculist. But, on the following day, however, as they were in the steamer, gliding down the broad river, Ita shading his head from the glaring sun, and never speaking of the scenery unless he asked a question about it, he heard her sigh.

"If it would be a comfort to you, dearest," he said, in a low voice, "we will stop at Heidelberg, and see this famous man. I really believe that I am afraid of hearing his opinion. But this is folly; it is better to know the truth, and make up our minds to bear it."

The suspense of the intervening days was difficult to endure. After arriving at Heidelberg, they had to wait some time before an interview with the eminent oculist could be obtained, so great were the demands on his time. At last the day and hour were fixed. On the evening before, Edgar and Ita sat at the window of the hotel, vainly trying to catch a cooling breeze.

The weather was prematurely hot for the time of year, and there was thunder in the air. His languor was excessive, and even her powers of exertion seemed to fail. It would have been a relief to be alone sometimes, or to stroll out and go into a church. But she could not bear to leave him, even for a moment; and if she could have done so, they were no longer in a region of open churches and Catholic altars. No visible token of religion met the eye, and nothing spoke of God on week-days in this Protestant land.

"And if he is to be always as he is now," she mused, "what is to become of us? It was bad enough to glance, even in thought, at the idea of his thrusting her from him when he was comparatively strong and well; but now . . . . Shall I see him led to church by another, and go my own way alone? Who but I could read or write his letters? Who but me could he ever trust? Who but I would work and live for him as a second self?" The thought of Annie crossed her mind, and an emotion of wild jealousy mingled with those heart-rending questions. No mean, common jealousy, but something like despair at the idea that she might be driven from him, and the forsaken Annie minister to his helplessness, and tend him in his grief. Yet she almost clung to it, even while it broke her heart. Anything better than to think of him alone even though it should be his own desire. Her lips uttered no sound—no sigh escaped her; but her hands were clasped together with an intensity that betokened the terrible struggle in her heart. She looked at those eyes that could not see her, with an imploring tenderness which no words could have expressed. She thought of the blind persons our Lord had cured. She prayed that Edgar might see, and then she would accept every other trial. After a long silence on both sides, he said, "Ita, come here."

She went and knelt down by his chair, with her head bent on his hand.

"You are crying?" he quietly said.

She kissed his hand without answering.

"Ita, my own," he whispered, "we must accept this trial with resignation, if it should be God's will it should continue."

"Oh, I could, I could!" she exclaimed, "if. . . ."

"If what, love?"

"If I was sure you would never. . . ." She was going to say, "part from me;" but could not utter the words.

Purposely or not, he hastened to say, "No *ifs*, my darling. We must accept *all* God wills."

"Oh, but he could never will that," she exclaimed, answering her own unspoken thought.

"I hope," Edgar said, "I am resigned to everything He may ordain." Then stopping, as if he had suddenly guessed her meaning, he added, with strong emotion, "Except what I am sure will never happen;" and then drawing her close to himself, he whispered, "to your forsaking me."

She said nothing. What could she say at that moment? But she looked at the dull leaden sky, darkening with a rising storm, and, as if trying to see beyond those heavy clouds, silently breathed the prayer, "Oh, my Lord, let not my trial be greater than I can bear."

And God never does thus try His children. As their day so is their strength. If Edgar and Ita had been doomed to hear the next day a sentence which would have confirmed their worst fears, even as they were situated, even with all the additional bitterness which their mutual position would have lent to the trial, His upholding arm would have carried them through that terrible ordeal, and given to each what each would

have needed. But it turned out otherwise; better than they had almost dared to hope. The next day came, as all days come, whether longed for or dreaded, and the hour arrived which they looked upon as the crisis of their fate. After a long, weary waiting in the outward chamber of the great man's audience-room, they were summoned to it; Edgar's eyes carefully examined; his previous and present state of health minutely inquired into; the circumstances of over-fatigue, recent illness, exhausting heat, and sudden change to piercing cold ascertained, and then the oculist said—

"Well, now, I'll tell you what: use the prescription I shall give you, and go and spend a month at Spa, and take care not to catch cold, and I'll warrant it you'll see as well as I do by the time you have finished a course of the waters there. Weakness and a cold, sir—nothing, madam, but weakness and a cold;" and sitting down, he wrote directions and a prescription.

Ita had gone away to the window. The tears were running down her face like rain—bright great tears full of joy, and beautiful, like the rain-drops after a storm.

They travelled from Heidelberg to Spa with lightened hearts, almost in gay spirits. And it was a happy month they spent in that quaint place, almost the oldest of all watering resorts—that pretty valley amongst the heath and gorse-covered hills, where the air and the water are both like crystal, pure, bright, and sparkling, and strength seems to breathe out of every spring and every bush.

The doctor's previsions were soon justified. Soon Edgar's sight began to return. Soon he was able to walk and to ride; colour returned to his cheeks more even than in the South, and vigour to his frame. When at the end of five weeks, they embarked at Ostend, and then from the steamer caught sight of the

white cliffs of England, he felt happier, as well as in better health, than he had done for years. Ita was deeply thankful; her heart overflowed with gratitude that once again a dark and bitter grief had been spared them. But she measured more fully than ever by the light of the mercy shown to her the obligations it enforced. The beautiful old French words, "Fais ce que dois advienne qui pourra," seemed stamped on the future, from which an overwhelming trial had passed away, and she felt more than ever bound to redeem the pledge she had given by her husband's bed of sickness, and renewed by his side during those recent long days of anxious misery.

Edgar had a great power of believing everything he wished; and though he had perceived plainly enough that Ita had lost all faith in the Anglican Church since she had been abroad—and, in truth, he was not much surprised at it, considering what she had seen and heard in English chapels on the continent—he made no doubt that, once at home, and surrounded by her old interests and occupations, she would settle down into a good Churchwoman. There was always at the bottom of his heart the feeling that it was impossible she could act independently of him with regard to religion—that she would never make up her mind to do so. He not only loved his wife, but he thoroughly appreciated her. He valued in Ita the qualities he was deficient in himself. Though in some ways a proud man, though possessed of a great confidence in his own judgment, he was not vain. He was quite aware that Ita excelled him in sweetness of temper and generosity of character. He felt, to his very heart's core, the beauty of her perfect unselfishness. Perhaps he considered this as a peculiarly feminine virtue, but did not admire or love it the less on that account. It was his high estimate of that, her peculiar merit, that made

him inwardly exclaim, whenever a misgiving arose in his mind, that she wished to become a Roman Catholic, "She could never be so selfish." How few even of those who think they know what faith is, understand that it is something too real and too sacred to be adopted or renounced at will, and that its requirements must necessarily be absolute! Edgar thought his wife could not be so selfish as to act up to her convictions, and inflict upon him such acute sorrow. Had she been less unselfish he would have known more of her secret sufferings, and more correctly estimated the strength of her convictions.

It was late in the afternoon of a July day that Mrs. Langdon drove to the London Bridge Station, to meet her son and his wife. They all came back together to Lowndes Square, where they were to spend two or three days. Edgar was delighted to be in London again; and though Ita did not share this feeling, and though the red chimney-pots and dingy rows of small houses which present the first aspect of London on that side to travellers from abroad, seemed to her rather depressing, and the noisy streets unattractive, she took care not to betray this impression. She enjoyed her husband's pleasure, and said to his mother, "Does he not look well?"

"Well, yes, pretty well, I think," Mrs. Langdon answered; "but I do not like the look of that green shade over his eyes."

"I can take it off now," Edgar said. "This pleasant London twilight does not overpower a weak sight."

"So you are glad to be in London again," his mother joyfully exclaimed.

"More, more than glad," he replied. "People say 'Life is life in those sunny climes;' I feel life is life in these dear foggy streets."

"And you, Margaret, are you pleased to come back to England?"

Mrs. Langdon had not got into the habit of calling her daughter-in-law Ita. Whether the unusual name by which she was addressed had failed to catch Mrs. Derwent's ear, or that she wished not to answer the question, did not clearly appear; anyhow, she went on coaxing Mrs. Langdon's little dog, who occupied the fourth place in the carriage, without raising her head. He had taken the instinctive fancy to her which every living creature was apt to do.

"You will stay with us some days, I hope," Mrs. Langdon said to her son, without noticing her daughter-in-law's silence.

"Till Monday, if you like to keep us till then," Edgar answered. "I wish to spend Sunday in London, but we must soon go to Holmwood. Both Mrs. Gerald and Annie are anxiously expecting us."

"Mrs. Gerald is very ill, I hear."

Edgar and Ita both started.

"Have you heard that lately?" he asked.

"About a week ago, Miss Derwent was in town for one day, and called on us. She appeared very uneasy about her aunt's health."

"Perhaps we ought to go at once," Edgar said.

"Oh, dear no. I am sure she is not in any immediate danger. Miss Derwent said so. The doctors think she may live a long time yet. You must not disappoint us by going before Monday. Indeed, we cannot hear of it, and I have accepted an invitation to dinner for you both for Saturday."

"Have you; and pray where?"

"At Lord and Lady Carsdale's. You will meet there your old friend, Mr. Hendon, Margaret."

"Oh, is he in London? I shall be very glad to see him."

"Poor Aunt Gerald!" Edgar ejaculated. I did not know she was so ill. Is she really, do you think, not likely to recover?"

"Well, I really don't know. Miss Derwent said the doctors were puzzled about her case. She is dreadfully nervous. What a pity it is when people are nervous. I hope you do not suffer from nervousness, dear Margaret?"

"I am quite well," Ita said; but she could hardly have asserted with truth that she did not suffer from nervousness, for ever since her arrival in England she had felt an inward agitation, that made her hands cold, her cheeks hot, and caused her to start at the least noise.

That day at dinner the conversation was kept up principally by Mr. Langdon and Edgar. Their two wives were chiefly occupied with watching and turning the course of conversation, when it veered towards dangerous subjects. There could not be two persons more unsuited than Mrs. Langdon's husband and her son. Not only did they on most points differ in opinion, but their characters and habits of mind were essentially opposed and irritating to one another. There was a shade of solemnity in Edgar's manner, a slight inclination to lecture others, and lay down the law, which provoked those not predisposed in his favour. His handsome face—his earnest and expressive countenance—his gentleness and kindness, made up, in the opinion of most people, for those little defects which were never glaring nor obtrusive, but just happened to be those which particularly provoked Mr. Langdon. He thought his step-son pompous and dictatorial, and he met the heavy ammunition of his earnest and energetic arguments with a volley of light sarcasms and jests, which tried beyond measure Edgar's patience. Their peculiarities reacted recip-

rocally on their tempers, and Edgar was never half so consequential, or Mr. Langdon half so flippant, as in each other's society.

For some time, by dint of good management on the part of Mrs. Langdon and her daughter-in-law, none but the safest subjects were discussed, and they thought all danger of an encounter had blown over, when at dessert all at once Mr. Langdon began on what they all felt to be *une question brûlante*.

"So your friends the Rolands have *turned*, as the poor people call it."

There was a dead silence.

Then Edgar said, in a very grave voice, "It is very sad."

"And pray why is it sad?" Mr. Langdon asked. "They are now openly what they were in secret before. They have told the truth and shamed the devil, as we used to be advised to do in old days. They are honest, *voilà tout*."

Edgar's colour rose, and his eyes assumed the peculiar expression which his mother knew betokened a storm. She said, in a way intended to be soothing—

"You know, my dear boy, that Mr. Langdon has never been able to understand about Church principles, and how Protestants can be Catholics . . . ."

"My dear mother," Edgar began, in a deprecating tone; but in the meantime Mr. Langdon burst forth—

"Church principles—Church fiddlesticks! I can understand Protestant principles and Catholic principles, but not the principle of being both at the same time. Just because a set of young fellows at Oxford wanted to have a Catholic Church of their own, and would not make use of the long-established one which had served the purpose since St. Peter's time, they must needs try and turn our poor old respectable Protestant Church of England into something she

never was, poor dear! and never was meant to be, and make her play her new part, awkwardly enough at times, I fancy. I sometimes sit and laugh at the thought of what old George III. would have said if any one had told him the Church of England was *not* Protestant!"

"I really cannot enter into an argument on this subject," Edgar exclaimed, "in the tone which you use. It is far too important a one, especially for a priest of the Church of England."

Mr. Langdon's eyes twinkled with an amused expression. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I fancied that when you married, you had given up that Popish idea of being a priest. Pray, Mrs. Derwent, has he converted you to the *via media* religion. Is that its name now?"

Ita made no answer, and did not raise her eyes from her dessert plate.

Mrs. Langdon, in despair, gave the signal for withdrawal. It was dangerous to leave Edgar and her husband *tête-à-tête*, but worse to remain and be present at any further discussion between them.

When she and Ita were seated on the sofa in the drawing-room, she said to her, "I am so annoyed at the way Mr. Langdon will go on talking before Edgar, as if on purpose to provoke him. I was afraid he would begin about the Rolands, though I had told him it was a sore subject. But now, my dear, seriously, quite between ourselves, it is really of great consequence that dear Edgar should not go into extremes. I have never been against his Puseyite ideas up to a certain point, you know; indeed, I often go myself to the daily service at St. Paul's, and I should not object to see twenty lighted candles on the altar. I have no prejudices on the subject, but it would be a real misfortune if these opinions were to stand in the way of

his future preferment. If he will keep clear of extremes, he may, with his talents and advantages, rise very high in the Church. I assure you I have heard many people say that he is just the sort of person who might one day be a bishop. You see, my dear, if you should have a family, your present means would not be at all sufficient to make you comfortable. I know Miss Derwent says she does not intend to marry, but that is a sort of thing one cannot reckon upon."

"Oh no, certainly not," Ita exclaimed, glad there was one point on which she could entirely agree with her mother-in-law. "We wish her very much to marry."

"And most likely she will do so; but that just proves what I say. Good prospects in his profession should not be lightly thrown away; and you can have no idea, my dear, how much going into extremes interferes with a clergyman's chances of preferment. And then one never knows what those opinions may lead to . . . . These poor Rolands! I was horribly vexed that Mr. Langdon mentioned them; but really, my love, it is a terrible case. They have actually not bread enough to eat!"

"Is it as bad as that?" Ita said, deeply shocked.

"Of course, nothing can be worse. How is a man of forty to live and support a wife and two children? It is too late to turn to any other profession."

"Eliza has been confined?"

"Yes; she has had another little girl about six weeks ago. It is impossible to conceive anything more unfortunate. She is far from strong, and Jane tells me they cannot afford to keep a servant. It is ruin—perfect ruin. But one thing you see leads to another, as I was saying just now. That is why I am so anxious that Edgar should not commit himself to extreme opinions . . . ."

"But if they *are* his opinions, dear Mrs. Langdon?"

"Then let him moderate them, and draw back from extreme acts as many others have done. I assure you that a wife can do a great deal, in these cases, in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, just by putting in a word at the right time, and showing how much she dreads her husband going too far. I have always looked to your influence as the means of preventing Edgar's doing anything rash. That was my great comfort when he married."

The candid admission that she wanted comfort at that moment almost made Ita smile. Wishing to change the subject, she said, "I really think Edgar is getting much better."

"He looks pretty well, on the whole," her mother-in-law answered. "If you can only keep him from working too hard till he gets quite strong again! He used to say that you were worth three curates. I do not know what he could do without you always at his elbow. But I wonder why they do not come upstairs. I am afraid it must be very bad for Edgar to argue and excite himself. I think I had better ring for tea, and let them know when it is ready. If you are not too tired to play and sing, it would prevent their talking, and Mr. Langdon likes it so much."

Ita was just as anxious as her mother-in-law to stop any more conversation about religion. So, as soon as her husband and Mr. Langdon came into the drawing-room, she went to the pianoforte and sung some French and Italian songs.

"I hope you have not forgotten all your English songs," Mrs. Langdon said. "I must have my favourite 'Ruth.'"

"I cannot sing that," Ita murmured, turning over the leaves of her book to find something else.

"But I have got the music here, if you have

forgotten it," Mrs. Langdon officiously exclaimed, and placed before her daughter-in-law words, which seemed to her, written in letters of fire. During the first months of their marriage it had been Edgar's delight to hear her sing them. They sounded to him like a pledge of her devotion to him, and fidelity to his Church. He attached a particular meaning to Ruth's adjuration, and his wife used to utter it with an earnest pathos, which suited, he thought, her position and his own. She was, in one sense, an alien from his own land. She had been baptized, conditionally, at least, in a foreign communion, and he loved to hear her say, " Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Ita knew he liked this piece of music on account of these words, and she also had once been conscious of some vague feeling of the kind. The last time he had heard them from her lips was on the day at Mentone, when he had been seriously alarmed at what he called her Romish tendencies, and had tried, by the strong expression of his own feelings, to crush them in the bud. Since then she had put this song aside, and her husband had not asked for it. Now, however, with the music-book open before her, she was obliged to comply with Mrs. Langdon's request, and began, in a faltering voice, which gradually became steadier, the well-known strain. Edgar's eyes were fixed on the newspaper in his hand, but he listened eagerly to that sweet voice and to that old familiar air. It might be only his fancy, but though she sang as earnestly as ever, there seemed to him a different accent—a different spirit in the way in which she pronounced the words. Once they had sounded like the cry of a heart cleaving with a blind worship to the object of a human love, now they rose like the expression of the most ardent desire that can inspire an immortal soul—that of winning

to its own faith one dearer than life itself. The words had assumed another meaning in her thoughts. There were but one God, one people, and one Church, for Edgar and herself. *She* could never turn back. The light was on before. There was hope, at that moment, in her face and in her voice. He instinctively felt that she was calling on him to follow her; no longer following him with trembling footsteps along the shadowy path of uncertainty and doubt. In spite of himself, he felt it. He tried to stifle the thought; but it crossed his mind in that instant like a ray of light, soon quenched, however, by a determined act of the will. He was glad when the notes died away in his ears, but the echo they left behind in his mind did not subside as speedily.

No one asked for another song. Ita was very tired, and went early to bed. When Edgar had also left them, Mr. Langdon said to his wife, "That daughter-in-law of yours, Mrs. Langdon, is one in a thousand. One of the greatest darlings I ever saw."

"I hope she will always make Edgar happy," Mrs. Langdon answered, with a sigh. "She is a good little thing, and I like her very much. Still, it is a great pity he did not marry his cousin."

"What, that dull piece of goods? Of course, it would have been the right thing; but, for my part, I am glad he fell in love with the mermaid. I only hope they will not turn Papists, and he become a monk and she a nun."

"You do not mean that clergymen and their wives do that when they secede, or whatever it is called."

"Of course they do. What else could happen?"

"But the Rolands have not?"

"Only wait a little and see."

"Then it is still worse than I thought."

In spite of the experience which the whole course

of her married life should have given her, Mrs. Langdon had never yet learnt not to understand literally her husband's assertions.

The next day Edgar took his wife to see a house of charity, where an Anglican Sisterhood carried on various works for the benefit of the poor, which he used to be greatly interested in before his marriage. He thought she would be favourably impressed by the Catholic appearance of this convent, the beauty of the chapel, and the piety of the sisters, and as they visited the whole of the building, accompanied by the superioress and the chaplain, he anxiously watched Ita's countenance. He was not wholly disappointed, nor yet quite satisfied with the effect it seemed to make upon her. Now that she had lost all belief in the Catholicism of the Church of England, this display of its outward forms gave her more pain than pleasure. She admired the good works of the nuns, but there was something artificial and unreal in their studied imitation of the religious life, which she thought repulsive. The expressions in use among the so-called Anglo-Catholics grated on her ear.

At that time Mass, Benediction, Confession, were words which even in Sisterhoods were not in use. The bold innovations of the present day were not thought of, but there was an advance in that direction—the Puseyites were feeling their way, and approaching to the point the Ritualists have now reached. They took advantage of every doubtful expression in the Prayer-book which would sanction some new development, and called Roman practices by Anglican names, thus creating a phraseology that reminds one somewhat of Talleyrand's view of language: "La parole a été donnée à l'homme pour déguiser sa pensée."[1]

This effort to disguise what they dared not avow,

[1] "Language was given to man to enable him to conceal his thoughts."

was conspicuous in all the arrangements of the convent, and Ita was glad to get away from the chapel and the parlour where the superioress, the clergyman who directed the home, and Edgar, conversed in this strain, and to go to the sick wards, which were beautifully arranged. A large crucifix and several holy pictures hung on the wall. The image of our Blessed Lady was not to be seen there, but as they passed afterwards near the oratory of the sisters, Ita caught a glimpse of a pretty statue surrounded with nosegays of flowers. She glanced at her husband. He avoided meeting her eyes. He had so often spoken with severe disapproval of the devotion of Roman Catholics to the Blessed Virgin, that he did not like to be called upon at once to express a different opinion or to blame the Anglican Sisters. But the truth was that a change had taken place in his own mind on the subject, and he took an opportunity of whispering to his wife as they walked through the passage that led to the hospital, "I hope the day may come when prudence will permit us to pay that homage in public to the Blessed Virgin which devout hearts in our Church offer up in secret." She sighed—the time was past when such hopes could satisfy or quiet her soul.

As they passed through the long room occupied by the patients, one poor woman, apparently in a decline, whispered to the young sister who was giving her a cup of tea, that she would like to speak to the lady who was going through the ward.

This was conveyed to the superioress, who kindly stopped and asked Ita if she would gratify the sick woman's desire. "She is a foreigner," she added, "an Italian, who has been here some weeks."

Ita complied with the request, and standing by the bedside, said in a gentle voice, "Are you very ill? do you suffer much?"

"Yes," the woman answered in English. "I am so weak. I have no strength left at all. I did think I should get strong here with the good food and wine, but it does me no good. I will go away. I will die at home."

"Have you any friends in London?"

"Yes, one daughter. She has been married many years to an Englishman. I am myself an Italian."

"You speak English very well for a foreigner."

"I learnt it when I with my husband kept an hotel at Florence; our house was always full of English people. When he died I lost all I had, and came here."

Ita bent down her head close to the poor woman, and whispered, "Are you a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes," she eagerly replied in the same tone; and then added, "They say they are of the same religion here—all Catholics. That is all very well; it may be so, but I want to see one of my own priests. I will go home to-morrow."

"I dare say they would send for a Roman Catholic priest, if you asked them."

"Ah, but I had rather go home. I shall never get well. I should not like to die here."

"Where do you live?"

"At 15, Little North Street, Manchester Square. Will you come and see me there?"

"I am only in London for a day or two. I hardly think I can find time to call on you. But perhaps I could ask somebody else to do so."

Ita was moving away. The sick woman laid her hand on her arm, and detained her. "Excuse me," she said, "but will you tell me your name?"

"Mrs. Derwent."

"Derwent! Ah, there it is! You are just like what she was at your age—the lady I knew—the lady who

was drowned with her husband in the Gulf of Genoa. Are you their daughter?"

"No," she answered, blushing deeply, "I am their nephew's wife. I married Mr. Edgar Derwent. You knew, then, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Derwent?"

"Certainly I did. But you are so like her!"

"I have been told that I am like her picture."

"Do come, Ita," Edgar cried. "We are going to the schools."

"Will you come and see me?" the sick woman eagerly said.

"I will try," Ita answered, as she hurried away to join her husband. She would have given anything to stop with the poor woman, and, when she had left her, remembered that she had not asked her name. The superioress, however, told her that it was Ranolfi.

It was difficult to fix her mind on the exhibition of copy-books and needlework, which she was called upon to admire, and even on the evolutions in the infant school, which she usually enjoyed very much. At last everything was over, and they went to the door where Mrs. Langdon's brougham, which she had lent them for the day, was waiting.

"I shall walk home," Edgar said. "You can do your shopping, and on your way back leave our cards on the Carsdales."

Ita had been wishing, ever since her arrival in London, to tell him that she wanted to call on Eliza. Now, with desperate courage, as she was getting into the carriage, she said so. A cloud passed over his face. He hesitated. She added, "Your mother says she has been very unwell since her confinement, and they are so ill off. I really must go and see her, dearest."

"As you please," he coldly replied, and walked away.

"Do as you choose," are words which sometimes

leave a heavy weight on the hearts of those to whom they are addressed. But Ita had no doubt that it was right to go and see Eliza, unless her husband had particularly forbidden it. So, availing herself of the ungracious permission, she told the footman that she wished to be driven to number four in a little narrow street behind Manchester Square.

When they arrived there, the loud rap at the door seemed out of keeping with the humble appearance of the house. The girl who opened it said Mrs. Roland was at home, and showed Ita up to the third story, where she found Eliza in a very small and badly-furnished room, arranged, however, with that attempt at comfort and prettiness which betokens the habits of one accustomed to a different sort of abode. She was looking ill, though the colour that rushed into her face when her friend came in, disguised its paleness. Her baby was in its cradle, and her little girl, Ita's god-child, sat playing on the floor.

"Oh, dearest Mrs. Derwent," she exclaimed, "I am so glad to see you! I hardly thought you would come. Will you sit down here?" she added, making room for her on the black horse-hair sofa. "How is your husband?"

"A great deal better, thank you. And How is Mr. Roland?"

"Not very well. He suffers much from his head-aches. Meggy, come here and kiss your godmother."

The little thing got up with difficulty, and made a bad walk of it to the sofa.

"She is not strong on her legs," her mother said, taking her up on her knees.

"She is not so rosy as she used to be," Ita answered, as she kissed the little girl.

"That is the only hard part of it," Eliza said, in a low voice.

"Their being ill, you mean?"

"Meggy is not ill. It is only the change, the want of air and exercise, that makes her weak; but my husband is really out of health . . . ."

"And you, dear Eliza?"

"Oh, I am pretty well."

There was a moment's silence; then she said, "Eliza, you have gone through this great change. Tell me, have you found it what you expected?"

"No, not what I expected. To the last moment I fancied I should still feel some doubts and misgivings after I became a Catholic, but I have never done so. From the first moment, everything has seemed to me real, true, natural; and as regards the inward life, the life of the soul, perfect contentment and happiness."

"Then you are glad you changed . . . ."

"Yes, glad indeed. It makes up for all past and present sufferings . . . ."

"Dearest Eliza, you have had much to go through."

"A good deal, in one way and another. Sometimes, when I think of Bramblemoor, of the view from the back window of our house over the common, and of the feeling of the air, with the smell of the fir-trees, it gives me a faint sensation I can hardly describe. But it does not last . . . . and I would not be there again as we were, trying to persuade ourselves we were Catholics, and leaning wearily on that shadow of a Church that gave one no support or help. . . . It is like a bad dream to look back to it. My husband feels just as I do. We wonder together, sometimes, how we could be so long deceived by our ardent wishes . . . . He is very good, very patient."

"How strange it seems to look back to the time when you were such a thorough Anglican, and your arguments with Annie."

"Yes; nobody can say that we did not try to believe in the Church of England. Indeed it was almost a matter of life and death to us."

Ita pressed her hand, and said inquiringly, "You mean . . . .?"

"Why, dear Ita, I do not see, humanly speaking, how my husband can support us and live. He does some copying for a lawyer, but this brings in very little, and he is often over-tired. I try to earn something by needlework, but with two children and no servant, there is little time for it."

"Have you no servant at all?"

"No, not the shadow of one," Eliza answered, with a smile. "Sometimes I get a charwoman for the day; you know we are quite—quite poor. But you must not look so unhappy, Ita; it is wonderful how one bears things that seem terrible to look forward to. I could not help thinking during my last confinement of the time when this child was born, and all your tender care of me, the luxuries I had, and all that Annie sent me. How different it was; but yet I was happy—so thankful we had not delayed our conversion till after my confinement."

"The last days at Bramblemoor must have been the worst part of it. Last days are always so sad."

"They were very sad; you know Annie would not see us before we left."

"When we went to Italy you did not think of taking this step?"

"No; Mr. Roland used sometimes to speak to me—he had done so for some time—of the possibility that it would come to that. I tried to shut my eyes to it, but I believe that at last I saw even more strongly than he did, that we could not remain as we were. He worked so hard that he had not as much time for thinking as I had. However, when it came to the

point we were perfectly agreed. Is Mr. Derwent as angry with us as ever?"

"He never mentions you, but I saw yesterday when Mr. Langdon alluded to the subject, that he still feels it very much. Eliza, the clergyman at the home in —— Street said yesterday that nobody has an idea of the regrets that converts feel, though they have not courage to go back."

"Did he?" Eliza answered, with an amused smile. "I wonder how he gets his information on the subject. The Rev. Mr. Bennet, in a sermon he published some time ago, spoke of the cruel disappointment experienced by converts to the Church of Rome, and adds, 'they never tell us of these feelings.' One cannot help asking: How then is their existence known? I was so afraid that Mr. Derwent would not let you come to me; I am so glad he did not prevent it."

Eliza's eyes were filled with tears; Ita's were overflowing. She remembered all Eliza's former delight in her little home at Bramblemoor, which they had all combined to make a perfect cottage residence; her intense love of country life; her charities to the poor; her little feasts for the school-children; her walks over the common with her own little girl in search of blackberries and thistledown; and then looked on the dingy walls, the wretched, low houses opposite, the absence of comforts, the pale children, and then of what Mrs. Langdon had said, that sometimes they actually wanted bread. Could this be literally true? She could not go away without trying to find out.

"Dear Eliza," she said, "you will not mind my asking you . . . . ?" she paused.

"If it is anything about religion, dearest Ita, I would rather you asked my husband than myself . . . ." her voice shook with emotion. "I am so afraid of urging you to what, if once you see it plainly, you

must act upon: I fear you have not courage to do so. Perhaps, too, though this is wrong, I am also afraid of what you may have to suffer . . . ."

"I was not just then thinking of myself," Ita answered, "what I wanted to say just now when you spoke of sufferings was this, have you been, are you ever in real *want?*"

Eliza's lip quivered. "I had rather not speak of that. I should only give way."

"Oh, but do not give way—do speak out," Ita impetuously exclaimed. "You were always too reserved. Has it come to what I said. Dear Eliza, now at this moment, would this sovereign be of any use . . . . to buy something for baby," she added, trembling, lest her offer should wound.

"Thank you so much," Eliza said, smiling; "it will buy us food. Yes, it is a great blessing—a great relief. My husband could not get any copying last week, but he will have some to-morrow. Dear Ita, you never gave an alms that was more thankfully received."

"But do not your parents know this? and Jane? Have they quite forsaken you?"

"No; they come to see me sometimes—Jane, at least, and I go and see my father and mother. They are not unkind, but they think we must abide by the consequences of the step we have taken. And then I do not let them know quite how bad it is. They would only be more angry with my husband. They say it is dishonourable after marrying me to have thrown up the means of existence."

"Well, I should have thought everybody, however they might regret the result, would respect you for sacrificing all earthly considerations for conscience' sake."

"The tone of the Anglican papers," Eliza said, "sometimes makes one smile on this subject. The other day, when literally we did not know where we

should get wherewith to exist, if my husband did not obtain some employment, and he did not know where to turn for it, I met with a passage of this sort in one of those papers: 'Let them go, those who will not bear the heat and burthen of the day; who will not fight and suffer for the Church. Let them seek ease, comfort, and sunshine in a foreign Communion, while we struggle on in faith and patience.' I could not help thinking, not only of ourselves, but of others still worse off than we have yet been."

"Are there many such?"

"So many that those who would and do try to help them, are almost in despair, and the number increases, of course, every day! Thank God for it; yes, thank God for it, in spite of all this suffering. The case of married Anglican clergymen is, of course temporally speaking, worse than any other."

"What a variety of trials there are in the world," Ita exclaimed.

"You would think so, indeed, if you lived in London. It is in itself a trial to see so much misery that you cannot relieve. Oh, the amount of it that comes across one every day, and the hardening of heart that seems almost inevitably to ensue! If we had heard at Holmwood or Bramblemooor of a family with two or three sick persons without a bed to lie on, and children crying for food, how horrified we should have been. Here we know that such are to be found at every corner and turn of this terrible London."

"I always thought you a courageous woman, Eliza. Now I think so more than ever."

"Do you? Why?"

"Because you look so calm, while I can hardly bear the idea of what you go through."

"You do not yet know the blessings which soften the trials."

"Perhaps more than you suppose of both," Ita said, rising to go.

Eliza looked at her earnestly. She was surprised to see so little apparent struggle in her mind. She did not know that the struggle was in one sense past, though the keenest suffering was to come.

"Do you know any one," Ita said, as she was going towards the door, "who would look after a poor Italian woman, who is going back to her home in this neighbourhood to-morrow, from the hospital in —— Street? I think some of your friends would be interested in her; for she leaves that place on account of her religion. Not that they are illiberal, I believe, towards Roman Catholics; but she wishes to die at home."

"I will go and see her myself," Eliza said, "and if she wants assistance I will speak of her to others."

"I shall be so glad if you will, for I promised to ask some one to visit her."

With a parting kiss Ita took leave of her friend. As she was driving home her thoughts ran painfully on Eliza's poverty, and the little she could do to relieve it; for she had exhausted her slender means before leaving Mentone in providing for the payment of a small pension to Mariana. Her mind kept dwelling on the surrender so simply made of all the comforts, and almost the necessaries of life, by Eliza and her husband; and on the strength of the convictions which had forced it upon them. As she was crossing Hyde Park on her way back to Lowndes Square, she was delayed by the crowd of carriages; the contrast between the dingy little rooms near Manchester Square and that brilliant scene struck her forcibly. While she was slowly following the string, Jane, Eliza's sister, passed in a smart carriage, and dressed in the extreme of the fashion. Their eyes met; they smiled and bowed. Jane had married a rich banker, and had

a house in Grosvenor Place. There was another contrast; another mystery to such a heart as Ita's. One sister wealthy and prosperous; the other . . . . She thought of the grateful tears which had flowed when her own poor little offering had been made. Of course, Jane did not know the extremity of Eliza's poverty; but she must see the absence of all comforts in her poor abode. But then, again, Eliza had chosen her own fate. No pity was due to her. Her relations turned away from the thought of her trials like the Pagan judges did from those of the martyrs who would obstinately meet the wild beasts, or plunge into a furnace, sooner than deny their faith. "It is their own fault." This sentence hardens hearts which would naturally, perhaps, compassionate the sufferings of others.

"If they choose to bring up their children Roman Catholics, it is their own doing if they starve," Eliza's father sometimes said; and that remark relieved him from any troublesome feelings of responsibility.

Ita mused on these things as her equipage made its way through the thickest of the crowd in Hyde Park Corner, and when she reached Lowndes Square it was time to dress for the dinner at Lord Carsdale's.

In the twilight of a summer evening, about twenty people were waiting for the announcement of dinner in Lady Carsdale's drawing-room. Ita and her husband were amongst the number, but she at least knew no one there except her old friend Mr. Hendon, who to her great satisfaction, took her down to dinner. On her other side was a young man she had never seen before, whom, however, she guessed, by his likeness to Lady Emma Lorton, to be one of her brothers. As she was seated at the corner of the table, the conversation was carried on for some time between her two neighbours and herself; but when Mr. Cars turned

round to speak to the lady on his other side, she and Mr. Hendon began to talk of Holmwood. He asked if they were soon going there, and said he had heard that Mrs. Gerald had been looking forward anxiously to their return.

"Have you seen her lately?" Ita asked.

"Yes, last Saturday, and I own I was struck with her looking very ill. There is such a restless expression, something so keen and over-eager in her countenance; she always had it to a certain degree, but it has very much increased lately."

"Does she go out driving as usual?"

"I did not hear. Miss Derwent said it was very difficult to induce her to leave her room. She asked me to go and sit with her. I had not been for many years in that room. I was surprised at her making me look at the pictures of the late Mr. and Mrs. Robert Derwent. She told me to draw aside the curtain before them. I thought she had never been able to bring herself to speak of them. How strangely like the portrait of the lady is to you!"

"And how extraordinary it is," Ita thought, "that twice in the same day this likeness should have been mentioned to me!" And not being inclined to let the subject drop, she said, "You mean the one with the turban?"

"Yes; it is a charming picture. There is something in the expression of the mouth like the picture of the Cenci, and you have it too. It is not at all like Miss Derwent, though she is very handsome also in her way—very much improved this year. She is grown thinner and paler, which becomes her, I think; she wanted fining down. And are you going now to settle at the Vicarage for good and all?"

"I suppose so; at least if Edgar is well enough to remain in England next winter."

"Did you enjoy yourself abroad?"

"Very much till he fell ill. I often thought of you at Mentone. It was such a pleasure to see all our favourite spots again."

"Ay, ay, our old hunting fields—the nooks and corners—where we found the first anemones, and the tulips, and your dear periwinkles. Stay, was it not to Capo Martino we went for the early crocuses?"

"Oh, yes; and then the orchids in the Mentone valley. Do you remember the day we walked all the way to Castellar?"

"Did we, indeed? I know you used to take me long distances, especially when you wanted some particular flower. How have the old people kept up the garden of the Villa?"

"Pretty well. Francis is getting old. By the way, he and Antonio asked a great deal after you. You ought to have come and joined us."

"I am getting lazy about travelling. Even coming to London is rather an effort. By the way, have you come across those foolish people the Rolands?"

"I have seen Eliza to-day."

"No; have you? How is she? Is it true that they have positively nothing to live upon?"

"I am afraid so. Nothing can be worse off than they are about money."

Mr. Hendon shrugged his shoulders.

"What a pity it is they should have committed such a piece of folly. Mind, I do not, for my part, care a straw whether people are Catholics or Protestants; but, really, when it comes to ruining the whole of a person's prospects, and beggaring wife and children, it is lamentable. They were so comfortable at Bramblemoor, if people only would have left them alone. It was all very well for the Sydneys to please themselves: they could afford to become

Roman Catholics, if it suited them, but those poor Rolands, I am very sorry for them . . . . "

"Eliza does not seem unhappy."

"Poor Eliza, such a desperate Anglican as she used to be. Do you remember the fights I used to have with her about her theory of branch churches, and her being so angry at my calling her particular little section of the Church of England *the twig?*"

"Indeed I do; and your arguments about the illogical position of Anglicanism; they made a great impression upon me."

"Good heavens! I hope not," Mr. Hendon exclaimed, with a funny look of dismay. "Not the wrong way, I hope. Nothing I said drove you in a Roman direction, I trust . . . . ?"

Ita, not choosing to answer this question, turned a little towards her other neighbour. Having overheard her speaking of Mentone and San Remo, he said, "Have you read, Mrs. Derwent, that charming book, 'Doctor Antonio?'"

"Yes, I have," she answered, with a smile.

"And are you not delighted with it?"

"I like some of it; the descriptions of scenery, and pictures of manners, for instance, very much, but it is a very unjust and foolish book, I think, in some ways."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Cars asked, quite astonished.

"Well, the author gives, for instance, a glowing description of the women of the Riviera. He says they are as good as good can be—the best wives and mothers in the world, and that the people are altogether more sober and well conducted than in any other country he knows. That drunkenness is very rare, and crime almost unknown in some of the provinces on that coast, San Remo in particular; and

then in the same breath, or rather the same page, he states that, provided the churches are well-attended, the alms plentiful, and the confessions and communions numerous, the clergy care little about the morals of the people. He praises the virtues of his countrymen, and then abuses their religion. Is this just or reasonable?"

"I did not observe that passage," Mr. Cars replied.

"Then, again, this writer, who is so proud of Italy, and has, so he says, at least, such a strong feeling about it—sneers at the religious spirit which has filled even the smallest towns, mere villages, with beautiful churches, displaying the most wonderful works of art. He ridicules the confraternities which have been the means, by their very innocent rivalries, of keeping up this love of the beautiful, this taste for the arts in Italy. Surely the objects of these associations—the building of churches, the decoration of altars, the beauty of God's service—are more refining and elevating than the average recreations and interests of the lower orders in this country? People sneer at the number of churches and chapels in Italy. Let them count the gin palaces in London, and the public-houses in small English towns. Oh, if people would only be fair!"

"There is one of your old bursts of indignation!" Mr. Hendon exclaimed, laughing. "I remember your habit of sitting quarrelling with a book. I have seen you get as flushed and eager with a volume in your hand, as if you were in the midst of an argument."

"Oh yes, I cannot help it. Really, I can bear (don't laugh) people to differ from me. I can bear their saying things I dislike and disagree with—but it is injustice that is so hard to endure. What the Bishop of Orleans calls *la savante malice* of misrepresentation—the violent cry against one country or one

party for things which are passed over in perfect silence when done even in a more glaring manner by others; the unequal balances in which actions are weighed. I wish those dealers in moral false weights could be brought to justice sometimes."

"But, my dear little lady, do you think any one is quite just and quite consistent? Is not every one more or less swayed by passion, prejudice, or enthusiasm?"

"Yes, I believe so, to a certain degree; but still there is an immense difference between people in the kind of rectitude I mean. I have met with books, read speeches in Parliament, which, from the bottom of my heart, I protested against as regarded the opinions of the writer or the speaker, but in which one felt there was truth and honesty."

"What should you say of me as regards consistency?"

"I think you are generally consistent, but . . . ."

"But what?"

"Sometimes I wish," this Ita said in a low voice, "that you were not so consistent."

"Now, really that is too bad, Ita mia. You said just now that you were not angry with people if only they were consistent . . . ."

"No—and I am not angry with you; but I am sorry because I think . . . . I mean, for instance, that you do not care, as you said just now, about people being of different religions, because I am afraid . . . . I mean that you do not think one more true than another."

"I think there is some truth in all."

"You do? I am glad you say so," Ita said, looking pleased.

"There is only one religion I consider consistent in its teaching; but then I cannot bring myself to believe what it teaches. I mean the Roman Catholic Church."

"But that is terrible, because if all others are inconsistent, they cannot be true, and so it ends in your . . . ."

"Come, we will not talk of what it ends in. There are arguments which had better not be forced to their conclusion."

There was a rather awkward pause, and then Ita, partly to change the subject, and partly to bring back the conversation to a point deeply interesting to her, said, "Mr. Hendon, were you acquainted—we were speaking of them just now—with Annie Derwent's parents?"

"Very well with her father—but I never saw her mother."

"And did you know Edgar's father?"

"Yes, when he was a boy; and then, after many years had elapsed, I called on him in his last illness, after his brother's death. He was not at all a favourite with Mrs. Gerald."

"Was he like Edgar?"

"A little, but not nearly so good-looking."

"Who painted the pictures in Mrs. Gerald's room?"

"She told me that the portraits of Robert and his wife and child were taken at Florence, when they went there from Nice; I do not know the artist's name. The others are by English painters, I think."

"Did Mrs. Gerald see her brother Herbert after Mr. Robert Derwent's death?"

"No, I think not. He died some months only after the death of Robert, and she was abroad."

Ita was continuing to talk about the family with the vague hope of hearing some new fact or detail about them, but Lady Carsdale soon gave the signal nod, and the women left the drawing-room.

Nothing of interest passed in the evening as far as Ita was concerned. Conversation with some new acquaintances, who were introduced to her, proved dull

and heavy work to a mind as preoccupied as hers was at that moment. She was glad when it was time to go home; and her head ached that night as she laid it on the pillow. Her sleep was restless, and her waking anxious.

The next day was Sunday. She always went to church with her husband, though she had not received the Sacrament since the time when, during his illness at Mentone, she had made up her mind to become a Catholic. That morning he had been to what he called an early celebration at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, and she attended with him the eleven o'clock service. It would probably be the last time, she thought, that they would kneel side by side in an Anglican Church, and while her heart ached with the most acute human sorrow at the idea of this approaching separation, a great calm strength supported her. When she said the words in the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," she mentally pledged herself to delay no longer the act which was to make her—not possibly, not even probably, but assuredly—a member of that Church. She felt like one about to emerge out of a mist, where fanciful shadows delude the sight, into the clear sunshine they begin to discern.

When, after the afternoon service that day, Edgar said to her, "Shall we go and take a walk in Kensington Gardens?" she said "Yes," and knew the decisive moment was come. During this walk she must tell him of her irrevocable resolution.

It was one of those summer days which, even in London, are delightful. Hyde Park was not so beautiful then as it is now—not gay with those brilliant flower-beds and undulating banks which charm the eye and cheer the heart, chiefly by the thought that all that loveliness and perfume and sweetness is within reach of the poor and the hard-worked in their brief

hours of recreation and repose; but a recent shower had freshened and deepened the green of the grass that evening, and the lime-trees near Rotten Row were shedding their delicious perfume, and the wavelets of the Serpentine glittering in the sunshine. As they passed alongside of it, Edgar repeated to his wife lines which often haunt the memory of those who are apt to muse on the strange and terrible contrasts, the lurid lights and the dark shadows, of London in its pride and in its misery:—

> "Oh! those old trees! What see they when the beam
> Falls on blue waters from the bluer sky,
> When young hope whispers low, with smiles that seem
> Too joyous to be answered with a sigh?
> The scene is then of prosperous gaiety;
> Thick, swarming crowds on summer pleasures bent,
> And equipages formed for luxury;
> While rosy children, young and innocent,
> Dance on the onward path, and frolic with content;
> But when the scattered leaves on those wan boughs
> Quiver beneath the night wind's rustling breath;
> When jocund merriment and whispered vows
> And children's shouts are hushed; and still as death
> Lies all in heaven above and earth beneath,
> What see the old trees then?"[1] * * *
> * * * * * * * *

As Ita walked on with a beating heart and languid step, for all her strength seemed in that trying hour to have passed from her frame into her heart, she thought what varieties of human suffering there are, and that those old trees thus questioned by one well acquainted with sorrow, had seldom looked down on such a grief as hers; and yet griefs of this sort are now rending the breasts of many and many a one in this land. The most acute pangs, the sharpest struggles exist in many a peaceable English home—in the midst

[1] "The Child of the Islands," by Mrs. Norton,

of quiet outward lives, shielded from notice, debarred from consolation or aid, by the strong power of reserve inherent in our English nature by the long habits of self-control women worth anything acquire. Acute as is this form of mental misery which we have depicted in Ita's case, there is one blessed feature in it: it arises from no mean, no weak, no sinful passion; it takes its birth in the deepest, truest, and noblest part of our being; it comes from God, tends to Him, and most often ends in Him. And where mutual suffering is endured, where loving hearts afflict each other—and even where, on one side, there seems hard and cruel usage—it may be, surely it sometimes is, without sin on either side; the violent and stern treatment which almost breaks a tender heart, may be like Saul's presence at the first martyr's death—the strange presage of an approaching change—the augury of one of those transformations which are doomed to astonish the world.

When they reached Kensington Gardens, Ita asked her husband to sit down on a bench near the clump of Spanish chesnuts behind the powder-magazine, and after a few insignificant remarks had passed between them, she said, "Dearest Edgar, I must tell you the truth. I must be a Roman Catholic." The dead silence which followed these words was perhaps the hardest trial she had to go through. She did not feel it possible to add another word before he had spoken, and it seemed as if he would never speak. His eyes were fixed on the ground; he did not move; was he bearing it better than she had expected, or was he shocked beyond utterance?

At last he said, "Do you fully understand what this implies? all it involves?"

"I do, Edgar," she answered. "I have counted the cost—it is dreadful for both of us—but it *must* be."

She uttered those last words with a tremulous emphasis, more expressive than the words themselves.

"No; it *must not be*," he passionately exclaimed. "It is utter destruction, misery, and despair. An end to all our wedded love and happiness."

"Our happiness, perhaps," she answered, with intense emotion, "but not our love—not mine, at least. God knows, I never loved you more than I do now. Oh, dearest Edgar, do try to understand, try to feel for me."

"You have no feeling for me; you say you are determined to oppose me; you despise my religion and insult my Church."

"It is of no use to answer, or to argue," she said, folding her hands together, and looking straight before her with a sort of appealing earnestness, "God knows how I love you, and He knows too what He asks of me."

"Wait."

"I *have* waited. I can wait no longer. Ever since your illness at Mentone my mind has been made up."

Another long silence ensued, then Edgar said, "I cannot speak of this; too much is at stake for me; my very anxiety, my intense interest in the question, precludes me from saying what I would, what I ought. Do not let us utter another word on the subject now. In a few hours I shall be better able to speak to you about it."

They walked home in almost total silence. How often when we go about in the thoroughfares of a great city we may be close to persons whose souls are filled with tumultuous agitation, whose destinies are hanging on a thread, or whose hopes have been suddenly crushed, who may have just taken a fatal or a heroic resolution, and we know it not. Children of the same Father in heaven—all creatures of God, and members of the same race—we remain strangers to all

but a few of that vast kindred of ours. Isolated by the boundless size of the great human family, it is only when some great visible calamity or some casual event breaks the silent barrier between man and man, that the relationship is felt and acknowledged. Have we not sometimes seen a face in the streets, or in a carriage in the parks, which has dwelt in our recollection from its expression of more than common mental anguish, and we have prayed that our common Father may take pity on that unknown brother or sister, and send them Him who is emphatically called the Comforter. Perhaps such prayers have been said for us erewhile, and drawn down upon us some secret blessings.

Edgar and his wife looked weary and harassed when they reached Lowndes Square that day, only just in time for the family dinner. It was a long evening to get through, especially without work or music. Edgar went out in the evening, and did not come home till late. After Ita had gone to her room she heard him come in and open the door of his mother's dressing-room. In a few minutes he came to her and said, "I have decided to go to Holmwood early to-morrow morning, but I have told my mother that you will remain here, at any rate, two or three days longer; that you have some business to do in London . . . . It is a dreadful business, Ita!" He turned away, and leant his head on his hand, and his arm resting on the mantelpiece.

She took his hand, and pressed it to her lips. He did not withdraw it, but said, "I have not yet given up all hope. If I followed my own wish and impulse, I would carry you away with me, and shut you up in my own home far from all possibility of accomplishing your terrible resolution. But I have taken advice from one I love and respect; I told him that the thought of this separation drives me wild . . . ."

Ita turned pale; she did not know in what sense

he used the word separation, and did not dare ask him. After a pause he added, "I am advised not to use compulsion; not forcibly to control your actions .... So be it .... I cannot see it myself. If you were on the border of a precipice I would snatch you from it .... but I am not a fit judge of my duty in this respect. Only remember I protest against the step you are about to take. I think it wrong altogether .... However, this is what I meant to say, what I have a right to insist upon. Here are the directions of two clergymen whom you are well acquainted with by name —one is Dr. ——, the other Mr. ——. They are both in London at this moment. Dr. —— can see you tomorrow at twelve; Mr. —— will be at home all the afternoon. I earnestly wish you to converse with both of them before you take the final step. They will put the truth before you far better than I can, and will show you the fatal consequences of your present delusion. In the meantime I shall wait and pray; when you can relieve me from this terrible suspense you will write, and then .... but I am sure it is impossible that you can decide to leave our Church."

"I have told you, dearest Edgar, that it must be so."

"How can you tell me till you have spoken to these holy and learned men? Why are you determined to break my heart? and your own too," he added, as he saw the look of misery on her face.

"They can only say to me what you have done. It is not as if I had not heard the arguments and read the books on your side of the question, and as if I had not striven with all my might against the opposite conviction. I will go to them, however, I will hear all they can urge. If they could convince me I should bless them as long as I live."

"You do not then *wish* to be a Roman Catholic?"

"I only wish it because I believe the Roman Catholic Church is the only true one. I must wish to do God's will, even if it makes me miserable."

"His will is that a wife should cleave to her husband," Edgar exclaimed.

Ita felt deeply pained; she was grieved that Edgar should use such an argument as that—should employ such sophistry. It was unlike him, unworthy of him. She sighed deeply, and leaving his side, went and seated herself at some distance in deep dejection. Then he exclaimed wildly—

"What, and if you shake in me *all* faith? I assure you that at this moment I do not feel as if I believed in anything."

"It is terrible," Ita murmured; "but it will pass away." After a pause, she said, "Edgar, if I was to say to you now—'My convictions are exactly the same as they were an hour ago; I am just as certain as ever that I ought to be a Roman Catholic; I have no faith in the teaching of any of the various parties in the Church of England, and cannot rely on the validity of her Sacraments; but I will give up caring for truth at all, I will go with you to Holmwood to-morrow, and enjoy this present life without troubling my head at all about religion,'—would this please you?—would you be satisfied with such a resolution?"

Edgar made no reply to this question.

"Well, go and see Dr. —— and Mr. ——. I will not say anything more; I will try not even to think about it till I hear the result."

The next morning he left London by an early train. It was almost the first time Ita had been parted from him for more than one day. She felt anxious and depressed, but prepared to fulfil her promise to him. Mrs. Langdon was slightly indisposed. She accordingly told Ita she would not go out, and placed her

brougham at her disposal. Soon after breakfast the following note from Eliza arrived by the post:—

"DEAREST ITA,—I went yesterday to see the poor Italian woman you mentioned to me. She had just returned home. I did not think she seemed in great distress, at least comparatively speaking. She anxiously inquired if you were still in London, and said she had a particular reason for wishing to see you. She asked me to tell you so. Do you think you could find time to pay her a short visit before you go? The Rev. Mr. Discoll has been with her, one of our priests, and he begged me to urge you to comply with her request. I am sure, my own dear, kind friend, that you will be glad to hear that my husband met yesterday an old acquaintance of his, who hopes to obtain for him regular employment—something not too fatiguing. 'Vous nous avez porté bonheur,' as French people say.—Ever affectionately yours,

"E. ROLAND."

It was just eight o'clock that day when Ita walked into Mrs. Roland's little sitting-room. She had dined in the middle of the day, had some tea at six, and told Mrs. Langdon she should not return home till late in the evening. Both the windows were open, but little air came in. She took off her bonnet and shawl, and sat down opposite her friend with a countenance that did not at once tell its own story. Eliza saw that it expressed emotion, but did not make out at first what sort of emotion it was. But when Ita suddenly rose and threw her arms round her neck, and said, "Wish me joy," she exclaimed, "Have you been received into the Church?"

"Not yet," Ita answered, "but I have seen a Catholic priest, Father ——, and to-morrow I am to be received. I have written to my husband to say so."

"Oh, dearest, God bless you, God help you!" Eliza exclaimed.

"He has, He does help me wonderfully. I am so thankful that I did what Edgar wished—I mean about seeing two Anglican clergymen, whom he told me to go to. It so entirely settled my mind. I had really no doubts before; but if the shadow of one had remained, those conversations would have dispelled it."

"How so. Tell me what happened."

"I went first this morning to Dr. ——. I suppose he is a clever man—people say he is. First, he began by repeating the usual arguments in favour of Anglicanism, which made no impression on me, as I have heard them over and over again, and they always strike me as quite inconclusive. But I was a little impressed by the awful things he said as to the presumption and danger of judging for oneself on a subject of such importance. He used very solemn words, and spoke of the great sin committed by those who, after having had opportunities of witnessing the workings of grace in the Church of England, by a deliberate act declare their belief that her Sacraments are invalid, and her ministrations void. He went so far as to assert that such persons were guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost."

Eliza smiled, and Ita quickly added, "I did not believe this for one moment, though the absurdity of the assertion did not strike me then as forcibly as afterwards. But it made me nervous. He adjured me to pause on the brink of the precipice. He told me he would answer for the salvation of my soul at God's judgment-seat, if I remained in the Church of England; but that he trembled for my safety, if I dared to leave her. Indeed, he did not see how such an act could find pardon. All this, and the idea that it was possible I was making Edgar so unhappy, without neces-

sity, caused me, for an instant, to waver. He assured me that Satan had transformed himself into an angel of light to deceive and beguile me from the Church of my baptism. That expression reminded me of my Catholic conditional baptism. What he was saying told both ways in my case, and, perhaps, most on the side he would have deprecated. But I own I was somewhat shaken. He seemed so thoroughly convinced himself, and I suppose at such a time, that that always has some effect upon one. I said something about seeing him again before leaving London; and during the following three hours vague thoughts of the possibility of delaying the final step kept passing through my mind."

Eliza was listening with the deepest interest to her friend's account of this interview. She had herself gone through the same agitations, only in a still more prolonged and intense form. Her belief in the Catholicity of the Church of England had been of such long standing, and so deeply rooted, and her aversion to Roman Catholicism in consequence so decided, that to remove the one, and conquer the other, had been a terrible struggle. She waited impatiently for Ita's next words.

"In the afternoon, at the appointed time, I went to Edgar's other friend. Do you know Mr. ——?"

"Not to speak to; I have heard him preach."

"Edgar and others had often said to me, that his singular piety and holiness were evidences of the sanctity that the Church of England can exhibit; that it showed how her teaching and her means of grace could train a soul in the highest virtue; and I must say he does look very very good. Well, he received me most kindly, and, after a little preliminary conversation, said that he understood that my mind was unsettled and dissatisfied with the Church of England."

"'More than unsettled—more than dissatisfied,' I replied; 'I have no faith at all in it as a Church. I am quite convinced that if our Lord has a visible Church on earth, to whom He has committed the teaching of religious truth to men, it can only be the Church of Rome. Intellectually, I cannot doubt this, but . . . .' I paused for a moment, and then added, 'I had determined, at the price of a sacrifice, greater I think almost than life itself, to act up to this belief, but . . . .' I again paused.

"'But what?' he asked.

"'But if it is possible that it is the devil who has put this thought into my mind, I must—though it seems to me like stifling the voice of conscience—I must make a desperate effort to drive it away . . . .'

"He did not speak for a moment, and then he said, in a low, impressive voice, 'But if, on the other hand, it should have been an inspiration of the Holy Ghost?'"

"I was so surprised, that I gazed on him without uttering. He went on, 'Do not misunderstand me. I am satisfied, myself, to remain in the Church of England. Indeed, I should think it very wrong, with my present convictions, and believing that God has given me a work to do in the communion in which His providence has placed me, to think of abandoning my post, and the charge committed to me. But, at the same time, I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that there are souls which seem imperatively called to the Roman Communion—whether, as I fully believe to have been the case in one remarkable instance, the prayers of Roman Catholics obtain for their own portion of our Lord's vineyard labourers, of which we were not worthy—or that, in some cases, there is an absolute need of special means of grace and spiritual aids more abundantly found in the sister Church than in our own. If

the convictions you speak of are of long standing—if your present intention has been carefully weighed and considered on your knees before God—if, as I believe is the case, it apparently involves the sacrifice of a great portion, if not of all your earthly happiness and still you do not doubt that you are called to make that sacrifice, I cannot, I dare not pronounce that God has not inspired it."

"Your husband laid before me last night the circumstances which seem to have brought you to this conclusion, a sad one for him, and admitted how gradual has been your approach to it. He came to me again this morning on his way to the station, and I told him, as I now tell you, that I dare not form or pronounce a judgment on this point. I cannot say to you 'leave us,' yet I dare not say, 'remain,' if you feel really bound in conscience to join the Church of Rome. I may regret it, but I cannot blame you for acting up to that conviction."

"Oh, Eliza, I shall always be grateful to the man who said those words. Edgar had told me he was one of the best and most pious clergymen in the Anglican Church, and urged his holiness as one of the arguments against leaving it, and now I found that this good man did not dare to blame or detain one who thought of abandoning her communion. From that moment doubt was no longer possible, not even that transient hesitation which had passed over my soul like a cloud over the sunshine. Here were two leaders of that fraction of the Church of England that calls itself the Catholic Church in this country, that small subdivision of Anglicanism that professes Catholicism, divided on a point vital to its existence. The intention of leaving her communion is, in the opinion of one of these leaders, without any doubt, a suggestion of the devil, and, according to the other, may be an inspiration of the Holy

Ghost. All other differences seem little compared to this. Some teach us to believe in Transubstantiation, and others in Consubstantiation. Some advise us to say the Hail Mary, others to abstain from it, or only say one-half of it. But even all this cannot be compared with the doubt in which opposite views as to secession must leave the soul if they do not at once resolve it in one way. All uncertainty for the second and last time vanished from my soul, and perplexity, after all the worst of trials, is for ever at an end."

"And you went to Father ——?"

"Yes, but first I wrote to Edgar to tell him the result of my two interviews, and my resolution to be received at once into the Church, if the priest I was going to see thought me sufficiently instructed. I felt that as Edgar was prepared for this announcement, it was better to do it at once, and now my future fate is in his hands."

The deep flush which had coloured Ita's cheeks while she was speaking, subsided, and an ashy paleness succeeded to it. She bowed her head on her hands, and remained silent. Eliza was feeling intensely for her, but it was not a moment for many words. English reserve is never more conspicuous than in those hours when two hearts are full, one of strong emotion, the other of ardent sympathy, and the feelings find no expression but in what sounds like cold questions and answers, or casual remarks.

"And Father —— agreed to receive you into the Church?" Eliza asked.

"Yes, I had a long conversation with him, and when he found I had carefully studied the Catechism, and had no doubts or difficulties, after giving me some instructions, he decided to receive me into the Church to-morrow. He thought that, under the circumstances, it would be better not to put it off any longer. He

knows a great deal about me from Mrs. Sydney and Mr. Neville."

"And when are you going to him for that purpose?"

"At half-past ten."

"Shall I meet you there?"

"No, dearest. I think I would rather go alone."

"How long do you think you shall stay in London?"

"It will depend on what I hear from Edgar. I asked if I might go to him on Wednesday. God knows what his answer will be! I do not know if he means me to go home. I live as in a dream. I had not been a whole day away from him since our marriage. It is as if one of us had died suddenly. I do not feel as if I was in the same world as before. On Wednesday morning I hope to receive Holy Communion—that long-desired blessing—and then strengthened by that grace to go home—or . . . ."

Ita could not finish the sentence. Tears choked her voice. At that moment Mr. Roland came in. She wrung his hand, kissed Eliza, and hurried away. Half way down the stairs she stopped, and, turning round, said—

"By the way, I will try and see that poor woman to-morrow. If I come here about three o'clock, perhaps you will go there with me?"

"Certainly," Eliza answered. "She seems very anxious to see you."

CHAPTER XIII.

When Ita arrived in Lowndes Square she found her mother-in-law rather discomposed at her having been out all day. "What a great amount of shopping and visiting you must have been doing, my dear," she said. "You look fagged to death. I am so sorry you sent the brougham away this afternoon. I hate your going about so much in cabs, and am always afraid of your catching something. Have you had some tea?"

"Yes, thank you, dear Mrs. Langdon. I had some before I went out the last time. I am afraid I have given a great deal of trouble."

"Oh dear no, my love; giving trouble is not one of your failings. I know no one who is so little troublesome in a house. But I hope you take enough care of yourself. Have you seen the Rolands to-day?"

"Yes, I am just come from them."

"Jane was here this afternoon. She was quite disappointed not to find you at home. She wanted to talk to you about Eliza. She is very unhappy about her."

"Is she?"

"Yes. She says the thought of her position is never out of her mind, and that she cannot help feeling very angry with Mr. Roland. She does not think it honourable in a man to marry a girl like her sister, and then reduce her to beggary, leaving the burden of supporting them on her relatives."

Mr. Langdon looked up from his newspaper and asked, "Do they support them?"

"No, I suppose not; but it is always an uncomfortable feeling, you know, that a near relative is actually in distress. It is so difficult to know what to do."

"That is the worst of those changes in religion. Religion was meant to bring peace and comfort on earth; and really it seems now to be always causing division and misery."

Ita opened a Bible that was lying on the table and read aloud the following verses from the Gospel of St. Luke, 12th chapter, "'Think ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, No, but separation: for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law.' This does not seem, dear Mrs. Langdon, to promise constant peace and comfort of the kind you speak of."

Mrs. Langdon reddened, and answered, "I really think, my dear Margaret, that you might read your Bible to a better purpose than to select such texts as these."

"And who is to choose for her the texts she is to study?" Mr. Langdon remarked. "I thought good Protestants were to 'search the Scriptures,' and learn all they could for themselves?"

"But you know Edgar says we are not Protestants," his wife rejoined. She had always an answer ready for the difficulty placed before her, but did not care much for its relation to the particular point in question.

"Oh, I had forgotten that," Mr. Langdon said, and returned to his leading article.

She went on in her particularly wise tone, "I am sure St. Paul speaks of a peace which passeth all understanding, and that makes up for the other texts."

Perhaps Mr. Langdon thought his wife's folly passed all understanding. If they had been alone he might have said so; but he did not like to make those sort of remarks before Ita, and therefore said nothing.

"Jane asked me," Mrs. Langdon said, "if it was true that the Rolands are trying to convert you. I said I could not believe anything so bad of them."

"Would it be wrong, seeing what they believe themselves?"

"It would be horribly ungrateful to Edgar who has been so kind to them."

"It depends, does it not, on what they think is truth," Ita answered, with an inward writhing under these remarks.

"Oh, come, my dear, it is all very well to speak of truth; but that sort of thing leads to all sorts of harm and misery. It is a great pity where people are carried away with false ideas of conscience. There ought, I think, to be a law to prevent persons from changing their religion."

"Well done, Mrs. Langdon, I advise you to take up that question," Mr. Langdon exclaimed. "You had better recommend the revival of the penal laws. Suppose you convert your friend, Mrs. Flashbourne, to that view. The next time she takes the Chair at the meeting for the Rights of Women, she might hold forth upon it. Mrs. Derwent, are you a Rights of Women woman?"

Ita smiled, and answered that she felt rather uncharitably towards the champions of her sex, and ungrateful to the politicians who take up their cause.

As they were going upstairs, Mrs. Langdon said to her daughter-in-law, "You know, my dear, we are only

too happy to keep you, but I cannot be so selfish as to want you to stay away from Edgar."

As this amounted to an inquiry as to how long she was going to remain, Ita answered, "I shall leave you, dear Mrs. Langdon, the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, really! so soon as that; but I must not be selfish. Only, you know, of course, how glad we are to have you."

As Ita closed the door of her room, she thought, "Where shall I be on Wednesday evening?"

By the middle of the following day she was a Catholic. That great change—the greatest that can happen in this world—had taken place in her soul and in her life. Where it is the result of deliberate, earnest, disinterested conviction, the peace which follows this great act is generally in proportion with the suffering which has preceded it. In each case the amount of this suffering has and will vary. Sometimes it vanishes all at once, and for ever, when the threshold of our new home is passed, and the weary struggle is at an end. Sometimes the beauty, the symmetry of the temple we have entered, the harmony of its parts, and the glory of its light, bursts upon the mind and entrances the soul from the first moment the door is opened; or else, like the magnificence of its earthly image, St. Peter's shrine at Rome, it breaks upon us by slow degrees, gradually winning its way into our hearts, and, at last, with cords of love, binding us to its altars. The mode in which we approach, the mood in which we enter, the spirit which we carry into the church, influences in a measure these differences. The associations of the past, the more or less strong attachment we have felt for the forms of worship used in childhood and in youth, the amount of our previous familiarity with those of the religion we embrace, our early sympathies, and our natural tastes, the timidity or the

boldness of our characters, the friends we leave behind or those we join—all modify in various ways the mere natural feelings connected with this great change. To some, the last effort is perfect agony. They have reached a point from whence they cannot recede, for neither faith nor reason can find a standing-ground anywhere but in humble submission to a living and teaching Church; but the fainting soul recoils from entering an unknown spiritual world, and shudders on the brink of the decisive act. Death would seem a relief, if it was not the very thought of death that presses on them the necessity of a decision on a point which involves the interests of eternity. To those who thus feel, we can only say the three words with which St. Peter brought his brother to our Lord—"Come and see."

There are others whose trial has extended over a lengthened period of time, and whose greatest suffering was the unsatisfied yearning after their true spiritual mother. Silently, by degrees, they drew near to her bosom, and, when received into the fold, felt like children going home. It is no unknown, dark region they enter. They always heard at intervals gentle accents calling them onward. They have not to regain the faculty of sight and slowly learn to appreciate the treasures of their recovered inheritence. In their case, it is as if the veil was simply drawn aside, and they quietly take their place in the arms of their mother. This was Ita's case. Her joy was calm and deep, and her soul at rest.

We seldom picture to ourselves any moment of our future lives exactly as it afterwards turns out. Things may be sadder or brighter—more painful or more pleasant than we expect, but very seldom just what we imagined that they would be. Thus it was with Ita's return to Holmwood, for she did return there on the

day after she had been received into the Catholic Church. Whilst they were abroad, she had at first often thought with delight of the pleasure it would be to arrive there and find herself again in the lovely little home where she and Edgar had spent two happy years. Later on, ever since his illness, and especially after their return to England, she had pictured to herself this return—if, indeed, she was to go back there at all—as fraught with great suffering. At last the long-thought-of day was come, and though anxious and more and more nervous as the journey drew to an end, she was not as unhappy as she had anticipated. On the Wednesday morning the first post had brought her a note from her husband, which only contained these words:—

"My dear Ita,—If you still wish to come here to-morrow, you had better do so. I will send the pony-chaise to meet you at six o'clock. If you have changed your mind, telegraph to say so.—Your affectionate,

"E. Derwent."

She was not then banished from his home. "Thank God," she mentally exclaimed; but the brevity and commonplace style of his note gave her a sort of fear that possibly he had not received her letter. They had spoken of her following him in two or three days. Did he merely write with that idea? She remembered all the strong expressions he had used with regard to his line of duty if she became a Catholic. How he had said that it would be impossible for an Anglican clergyman to exercise his ministry with a wife by his side, whose religion would be a constant condemnation of his own, a daily protest against his position, and a denial of his orders. She could hardly believe he had changed his opinion on that point, and could hardly

brook the suspense of the intervening hours. The prospect of again seeing Mrs. Gerald and Annie also agitated her. So many new strange ideas connected with them had occupied her mind since she had been parted from them. On the very eve of that day, a singular confirmation of previous doubts had unexpectedly occurred. Just after she had been received into the Church, and while longing to rest her mind wholly on the fulness of the blessing she had received, and the happiness she looked forward to on the following morning, the performance of a charitable duty that afternoon had led to strange complications in the line of conscience and duty, and produced many an anxious thought about the future. She at once longed and dreaded the moment of arrival.

At last, the station but one to that of Holmwood was reached. Then the train rushed across the common from whence the little church and village of Bramblemoor could be seen. That view reminded her of the winter three years before, with all its pains and pleasures. Then at last the woods of Holmwood came in sight. Then the western grove—then the first glimpse of the old house amidst the trees; the train slackened its pace, the whistle of the driver was heard, and she gave an eager glance at the platform to see if Edgar was there. Yes, he was standing looking out for her. He helped her out of the carriage, put her arm in his, and smiled kindly, though she fancied with effort. They drove through the park to the Vicarage speaking very little. All that passed between them were questions and answers about Mrs. Gerald's health, Annie's looks, and so on. Ita thought him pale, and felt that his manner was constrained. This was very painful to her. She could not look at anything with pleasure, though it was their favourite sunset hour, and the lawn, and the trees, and the shrubbery were in the greatest

beauty. She had longed for the journey to be over. Now she longed for the drive to be ended. As they walked from the gate of their garden to the door of their house, she asked if Mrs. Gerald wished to see her that evening.

"She did wish it, and had almost insisted upon it," Edgar answered, "but Annie would not hear of your seeing her to-night. She said it would over-excite my aunt, and prevent her sleeping."

"And Annie herself?"

"She does not want you to go to her till to-morrow."

Ita felt pained. She had been absent nearly a year, and Annie did not care to see her till the next day! But then she remembered that embarrassment, and perhaps resentment, might account for this wish to delay their meeting.

She went into the little drawing-room, and stood at the window. The garden was now the prettiest thing that could be seen. Annie had made all sorts of improvements in it. There was a perfect blaze of flowers; some rather large trees had been transplanted, with much labour and taste, and others cut down so as to make the views of distant country still more lovely; a little French parterre, with a very pretty fountain in the centre of it, was added on one side of the cottage, and took the place of the old kitchen-garden, which had been removed to the other side of the road.

Some new pieces of furniture made the rooms more comfortable and cheerful-looking than ever. Ita looked about her, scarcely believing she was there again. It seemed as if they had been such ages away. Edgar came and stood by her. She leant her head on his shoulder. He stooped and kissed her forehead. She could not endure not to make sure he had received her last letter.

"You heard from me this morning?" she said, "You know it is done?"

"Yes," he answered; "and I have made up my mind what to do."

She looked up into his face, her heart beating violently. She had a hope and a fear, but neither of them were to be realized. She did not guess what he meant.

"I will tell you this evening what I have resolved," he said. "There is the dressing bell. Had you not better go and get ready?"

When they left their little dining-room Ita led the way into the garden. The light was waning, and a heavy dew beginning to fall. Edgar wanted to get a shawl for her; but she was afraid of his staying out, and they went back to the library, and sat by the bay-window. Both were afraid to speak, but both felt that silence was intolerable, and attempts at conversation still worse. At last she said, "Dearest Edgar, I know how grieved you are at what I have done, and it is very good of you to be so kind to me. May I speak to you about it? May I tell you what I feel?"

He answered gently but coldly, "Of course I know you would not have taken this step if you had not considered yourself bound in conscience to do so. It is of no use to lament over what is irrevocable. We must bear it as well as we can, since it is our fate to inflict pain on each other. I am particularly sorry for Annie; she is broken-hearted about it. The suffering falls on her as well as on ourselves . . . ."

"I do not quite understand what you mean. I do not see how it affects her happiness."

"You do not suppose, my love, that I am going to remain here, as the clergyman of this place, under the present circumstances?"

The colour rushed into Ita's cheek, and she trembled

with emotion. "Are you then thinking? . . . . Oh, Edgar, is there any hope?"

"Not one atom of what you would call hope. Oh no, I should not have suffered the anguish I have gone through since yesterday if the shadow of a doubt had crossed my mind. If I had not felt that all my happiness and usefulness are at an end, in consequence of the step you have thought it right to take. But I do not reproach you. I have resolved on my knees not to say an unkind word to you. I will endure the trial God has sent me. Life is, after all, short . . . ."

Violence and anger would have been easier to bear than these mournful words. There was a dejection in Edgar's voice and manner which pierced his wife's heart. It was a keen and heavy trial. She guessed now what he intended to do, and asked, in a faltering voice, "But, feeling this, do you consider yourself obliged to give up the living?"

"I have done so to-day. I have written to the bishop to say I resign it. You may imagine what Annie feels about it!"

There was a silence of some minutes, and then he said, with a poor attempt at cheerfulness, "And now there is nothing to do but to pack up and fix on some cheap place to live in, where we may both practise our different religions."

Poor Ita! She sat staring at the sky, in which the stars were beginning to appear, one by one, motionless and mute, but with a rush of tumultuous thoughts, filling her mind with strange confusion. It was not her who was banished by Edgar. She was not, apparently, to be the chief sufferer; but what refined misery it was to be made the instrument of his suffering! For the second time she had, as it were, severed him from his beloved Holmwood. The praise of the woman who had done good and not evil to her husband all the days

of his life seemed, in that hour of morbid wretchedness, reversed in her case. She was always ruining his destiny; always standing between him and happiness. Not even in that exquisitely painful moment did she regret having become a Catholic—for those who have once really embraced the faith, it would be an impossibility; but she looked further back. She inwardly exclaimed, "Why did I marry him? Why did I show him I loved him? why did I come and thrust myself between him and Annie? His life was full of promise at that time. Wealth, this beautiful place, and the love of a good woman were all offered to his acceptance. He had accepted them, and then I, a nameless, penniless girl, came with my poor, wretched attractions, and ruined all his prospects. I, a stranger to them." Then through her mind, like a falling star on a dark night, rushed the thought that perhaps . . . .

Oh, what a strange one it was at that moment! "Who knows," she mused, "that a mysterious Providence is not overruling our destinies, and, as Shakespeare says, 'Shaping our ends, rough hew them as we will.' Who knows that the secret of my own birth is not about to be discovered, and that God is not working out His will for us through all this misery!"

One can fancy a person tossed to and fro on a heaving sea, and struggling to find his way to the land, resolving in very helplessness to lie still on the waves looking up to the sky, trusting that they may waft him to the shore and finding peace in that helplessness. So felt Ita that evening. While Edgar sorted papers and looked over the contents of his boxes, she worked at a piece of tapestry, begun before they had gone abroad. The half-finished flowers were somewhat faded. The colour had passed away from them, and so had joy and brightness from their lives. "And yet, my God!" she

murmured, "yet, my God, we both wish to love and serve Thee!"

Alas! that peculiar trial of our time, its harassing divisions, its miserable doubts, are they not the fulfilment of the prophecy that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children? If three hundred years ago the standard of rebellion had not been raised against the Church, not so many aching hearts would be asking now, "What is truth?" and turning away from the reply; not so many sentences would go forth in this land, condemning to poverty and banishment from their peaceful homes, men too honest to act a lie; kindred hearts would not be so often severed, nor happy homes be broken up.

Ita was very tired, and left the library early. She went away with the consciousness that every kind word her husband had spoken since she had arrived—that his endurance of her caresses, his silence as to his sorrow, had been immense efforts achieved by dint of powerful self-control. Was it pride or virtue that sustained him? Possibly a mixture of both. Ita ascribed it, and perhaps she was right, to pure virtue, and believed God would bless him for his goodness. When she rested her weary head on her hands that night to say her prayers, she remembered when and where she had offered to suffer far, far more than she had yet done to obtain his life and his conversion. This thought gave her strength. The greater her trial, the more right she had to hope.

At breakfast, the following morning, she timidly proposed to go and see Mrs. Gerald. Edgar said he would walk there with her. They crossed the lawn and shrubbery in almost total silence. The strong perfume of the heliotrope which grew in rich abundance all over the place, the sound of the many little streams flowing across the grounds, the cawing of the rooks, the feeling of the soft moss under her feet, the familiar,

homelike walk across the grove and the parterre, had not the same charm as usual. The loveliness of the whole scene was fraught with pain.

Edgar opened the garden door of the library, and led the way to the recess where Annie was sitting. She jumped up when she saw them, and her eyes fixed themselves on Ita with a stern and troubled expression. She submitted to her embrace, and then said in a cold formal manner, "My aunt wishes very much to see you, so you had better go to her at once."

Ita made a violent effort to restrain her tears, and left the room without speaking.

Mrs. Gerald was not yet dressed, and she sat down in the sitting-room to wait for her. Before her eyes were the curtained pictures; those pictures she had never seen but once. An impetuous desire seized her to look again at those portraits. It was such a new feeling had sprung up in her heart since the words, "My father and my mother" had secretly risen to her lips. A blank in her past life seemed filled up by that vision of a love that had once been felt for her—a love like no other love. The forms of unknown parents no longer rose before her like dim shadows; and since she had been a Catholic, one of her joys was to name them in her prayers for the holy souls departed.

She went up to the side of the room where those pictures were, and softly lifted up the curtain. There it was, that face, so beautiful and so innocent, which people said was like her own; and that little baby in its mother's arms. Had she been really that happy little child, closely pressed to that loving heart? As she stood gazing on it she could almost fancy she felt a mother's kiss on her brow and on her cheeks, but the sound of an opening door made her suddenly drop the curtain.

Mrs. Gerald came in with a feeble step. She was

led to her arm-chair and sunk into it before she saw Ita. When she did percieve her she tried to speak, but the effort failed. Ita fell down on her knees before her with her face hidden on her lap ; their hearts were full, and they both wept in silence. At last Ita looked up, and then Mrs. Gerald stooped and kissed her, and held her face between her hands gazing upon it, and pressed her lips on her hair and then smoothed it with her thin, trembling hands. When they both became more composed, Ita inquired about her health. Mrs. Gerald gave a bad account of it, but quickly changed the subject. "This has been a very unfortunate step you have taken," she then said, in a nervous manner ; "it has created much misery and complicated everything."

"God knows I would not care so much what I suffered if it was not for others. The hardest trial of all is to have obliged Edgar to leave Holmwood. I could almost better have endured to have been driven from it alone, as I once expected. And yet no . . . . after all he preferred me to Holmwood once before, and he loves me as much as ever, I think. I am very sorry for Annie, and so grieved, so very grieved to leave you. I have been a misery to you ever since I came here."

"It has all been very strange, but God's will, I suppose. I could wish to have been spared this last trial . . . . I wonder . . . ." She stopped andher mouth quivered . . . . "I wonder if you have ever guessed what I feel about you."

The colour rushed into Ita's face, and her heart beat violently. "I always have thought that you cared for me more than you said."

"I wish to leave Holmwood—I want to go to my cottage by the seaside. I want you to come with me. There is a Roman Catholic chapel there. Edgar could

spare you for a little while. I think it would be better for both of you just now."

"I do not think he could do without me. At all events, at this moment I could not propose to leave him. If he wished me to do so I would certainly go with you. But then, Annie?"

"I am of no use or comfort to her now. I am grown so irritable. My nerves are shattered, and she does not understand that sort of suffering. My waywardness has estranged her. She never loved me as I loved her, and now . . . . but it is of no use discussing that . . . . Edgar is really better I hope? though so much out of spirits."

"Yes, thank God. He is much better, but I am anxious as to the effect upon him of all he has and is going through. Oh, that I could have spared it him!" As she murmured those last words Ita's hands were passionately clasped together.

"That is what Annie fears; that he will be ill again. She was wild about it yesterday, but it is of no use telling you that; you must try and soften her."

"Has she made any new friends since we have been away?"

"Not one. Mrs. Sydney and the Carsdales have tried to get on with her, and invited her very often; but instead of becoming more like other people, she seems to try and keep every one at a distance. Her only amusement is working in the garden and improving the place. That is her passion; but when she heard that Edgar had resigned the living, her first words were, 'Then I shall shut up the house and go away.' I am always afraid of her taking some strange line of her own. She is so unlike other girls."

At that moment Edgar came in to say that he was obliged to go home. He whispered to his wife, who had followed him to the door, "Annie will not speak

to me. It is a wretched state of things; you must try and force her out of her reserve."

After a little more conversation with Mrs. Gerald, Ita took leave of her. As she was crossing the room she perceived a letter on the table directed to Mrs. Dallas. This was the name of the person who had written to the priest at Colla to inquire about the time when she had been found by Piombo. A whole train of agitating thoughts rushed into her mind, but she had no time to dwell on them now. When she went into the library no one was there. Annie had gone into the garden. She followed her down one of the alleys, and met her turning back, upon which she exclaimed, "Dearest Annie! you *must* speak to me."

"What is the use of speaking?" Annie abruptly answered; "I can say nothing you will like to hear."

"Anything would be better than this silent anger."

"Do you call it anger?"

"I am afraid you are angry with me."

"I wish you no harm. I hope you never will be as unhappy as I am."

"Oh, Annie, do you think I do not suffer?"

"Perhaps you do. I dare say you think so, but you have your new faith to support you; you consider yourself a martyr; and when you see Edgar unhappy, you comfort yourself by hoping he will be one day a Catholic, and that makes up for it."

Ita scarcely knew what to say. She was struck with the hard but mournful expression of Annie's countenance, but her next words took her by surprise.

"God only knows the misery you have caused me! I have never complained. I have never let any one know what I have suffered. From the time I was a little child I have loved Edgar. Yes, I can say so though he is your husband, for if ever there was a pure honest love it has been mine for him.

I never had but one wish, but one care, and that was to make him happy. I was afraid for some time of marrying him, lest I should not be the sort of person he could most love. I am not clever like him, I have not all his high thoughts; but I wanted to give him everything I had, and so I resolved to be his wife, and as good a one as I could. Then you came, and I saw he was getting to care for you as he would never have cared for me, and I gave him up to you . . . ."

Here Annie broke down. The strong heart gave way, and a torrent of burning tears flowed down her cheeks. Ita sank down on a bench, and hid her face in her hands.

"Yes, I gave him up to you and I was happy that he was happy. I lived in the thought that I could still use for him all I possessed, and work for you both, and make your home a pleasant one. When he was ill I thanked God that you were his wife, because you have gentle, soothing ways, and a sweet voice, and all the outside tenderness I have not. It was enough for me to see him writing or reading in his snug room, or sitting with you under the shade in the garden I had made so pretty, and to think he still loved Holmwood, and enjoyed it, and belonged to it. I made no friends but you both, and did not want any others."

"Dearest Annie, we both love you so dearly."

"I tell you, Ita, that you were bound to make him happy. If ever a woman was bound to make her husband happy, it was you. That was the only proof of affection you could have given me, and instead of that you have made him miserable. Never shall I forget finding him with your letter in his hand—his poor eyes almost blinded with tears—his hand feverish and burning. You have broken his heart; you have driven

him from Holmwood. Look at this place he loves so much; think of the poor people here; it is your own doing that he leaves them. No, no; it is too bad, too cruel, too hard. God forgive me, but I cannot forgive you."

She darted off, snatching her hand away from Ita, who was trying to detain her. The effort had ill succeeded; she would have to tell Edgar of its failure. When she went home, and into her bed-room, the want of some mechanical occupation made her begin to unpack her trunks. They would soon have to be again filled for another journey, she sorrowfully thought, but to be busy about anything at that moment was a relief. It happened that her eyes soon fell on the parcel on which she had written at Mentone, "My baby clothes." She could not help opening it, and looking again at the faded shawl, and at the initials A. D., and thinking what would be Mrs. Gerald's emotions if she were to show them to her. She would, perhaps, recognize that shawl; she would most likely know it again if it had been Mrs. Derwent's; and the sight of the night-gown, how it would astonish and agitate her. Much more connected with that subject had lately been revealed to her, but she had resolved for the present to leave the mystery in God's hands. It was not the time, she felt, to impart even to her husband the strong suspicions on her mind as to Annie's birth and her own; but it was a constant subject of thought. It had shot across her mind when, in her transport of indignation, poor Annie had pointed to the beautiful scene before them, and the expression of her face, excited by powerful emotion, had at the same minute forcibly reminded her of Mariana's countenance. She remembered the day when the bereaved mother had searched for the mark on her shoulder, and turned away sighing because it was not there; and perhaps all the time Annie was bearing that

mark. Perhaps some day, by accident, she might see it. What a moment that would be! It seemed so extraordinary to think that, in some sense, certainty was within her reach, and yet as practically unattainable as if removed beyond all possibility. She could never have brought herself to look for that mark; she would have felt as if she was doing something treacherous. What would come of it all? She hardly knew whether this mystery made her present trial lighter or heavier. Time would show.

CHAPTER XIV.

For a few days there was very little intercourse between Holmwood House and the Vicarage. Ita had caught a bad cold just after her arrival, and was obliged to keep her bed. There was, consequently, no question of her going to Mass on the first Sunday after her return, and to Edgar this felt like a reprieve. He was not sorry that this accidental circumstance had also prevented the necessity of being as much as usual at Holmwood House.

When Ita got better, she went again to see Mrs. Gerald, and that day the conversation turned on religion. The latter said, "There is one thing in your new religion . . . ."

"My *old* religion," Ita interrupted, with one of her smiles, which seemed always to dispel the cloud on the careworn face of the invalid.

"Well, your old religion, if you will—that must be a great consolation—that power of speaking with the most perfect security in the Confessional, even of the most important secrets. I have heard people say that there is less insanity in Catholic than in Protestant countries. I should not wonder at it. The relief to

the mind must be so great of disclosing harassing thoughts that may be preying upon it."

There was a pause. Ita always had observed that Mrs. Gerald, like many reserved people, opened more upon subjects when left to bring out her own thoughts, than if others chimed in with them, or tried to induce her to be communicative.

"I should have liked to hear your confession, Ita."

"Would you!" Ita exclaimed, with a smile.

"Yes; I should like to read into your mind, and that, I suppose, would be the nearest approach to it."

"I am not sure that it would. I might have thoughts that I should never mention in confession. There is no necessity for speaking of everything that comes into our heads. We are only obliged to accuse ourselves of our sins."

"There might not be a necessity, but would it not often be a consolation to reveal one's anxieties?"

"Yes; especially if we wanted advice."

"Talking of advice—what would be your opinion on the following question? I know a person whose mother died a short time ago and left her a diamond necklace. I have very strong doubts and good reasons to doubt, though I am by no means certain of it, that the mother had no right to that necklace, that it belonged to her sister, and in that case her sister's daughter, who lives in Australia, ought to have it. Now, am I bound to go to my friend and tell her my doubts, and advise her to examine into the matter."

"That is a sort of question," Ita answered, "which I should like to submit to a priest."

"Why more to a priest than to any other person?"

"Because they make a special study, I suppose, of these sort of difficult cases of conscience, and know what all good people have thought, and taught about them."

"But what do you think would be right in that case?"

"I am not sure."

"But think, and say something."

Mrs. Gerald fixed her eyes on Ita, who felt confused and afraid of seeming embarrassed, and just on that account blushed deeply.

"What *do* you think?" Mrs. Gerald repeated, in a nervous manner, but without losing the authoritative self-possession which never deserted her even when most agitated.

"I suppose," Ita at last said, with a voice that shook a little, "that if you yourself had had nothing to do with the mistake that you would not be obliged to say anything about it?"

"No, I suppose not. That would, of course, make a great difference; but supposing I had been under an erroneous impression, and then had found out my mistake, or at any rate was nearly convinced that I had been deceived?"

Ita could not help suspecting what was passing in Mrs. Gerald's mind, and felt a nervous apprehension of what might follow, and a great fear of committing herself by answering her questions. The present moment seemed to her the worst possible one for such a disclosure. For supposing that sufficient evidence could be adduced to prove that she, and not Annie, was Mrs. Gerald's niece, would it not be most distressing to her own feelings that this should take place at a time when Edgar was full of pity for Annie, and displeased with her. Would he not wish she had kept silence and not placed him in an embarrassing and painful position with regard to one to whom they both owed so much gratitude. There was a peculiarity in Ita's nature which does not always exist, even in good and amiable people, and that is a great generosity, the quality which

makes a person shrink beyond everything from taking an unexpected advantage over another ; from triumphing over any one, whether by reproaching a person for an unfortunate piece of advice, or a failure of any sort, even from pushing an argument so far as to leave an adversary no loophole of escape. If somebody made in her presence an assertion in that confident manner, which, with many, provokes opposition, and she could disprove it by irrefragable evidence, it was to her an effort, not a gratification to do so. She felt, therefore, the strongest shrinking from continuing a conversation which might have led Mrs. Gerald to a more direct expression of the misgiving that she could not help thinking existed in her mind. Yet she could not resist dwelling much afterwards on what had passed between them. The fact was that she herself had scarcely a doubt left on her mind that she was Robert Derwent's daughter, and that Annie was Mariana's child. On the afternoon of the day when she had been received into the Catholic Church in London, she had been with Eliza to see the woman who had spoken to her at the Anglican House of Charity. The latter had asked to be left alone with Ita, and after again asking her name, and ascertaining that she was married to the nephew of the Mr. and Mrs. Derwent, who had perished in an accident at sea, off the coast near Genoa, twenty-two or three years ago, she told her that during her illness she had been much troubled in conscience by the knowledge that the rightful heir of that family was kept out of his inheritance through a mistake, which had placed in possession of it a person whom she felt certain was not the child of the persons in question.

"If the young lady who is called Miss Derwent were to die, would your husband be the next heir to the property ?"

"He would," Ita answered, "supposing she died without children."

"Then," Madame Ranolfi exclaimed, "he is the lawful owner of it at this moment."

She then proceeded to give Ita the following explanations:—

"As I told you the other day, Signora, my husband and I kept the Hotel of the Gran Duca, in Florence, for several years after our marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Derwent, their little child, and their servants, stayed in our house for four or five months the last year of their lives. They sailed from Livorno for Genoa in the middle of the month of May. I went with them to Livorno, and saw them on board the unhappy ship that took them to their death. A few days afterwards we heard of the dreadful accident, and a messenger came from Madame Gerald, to request that my husband and myself should come as quickly as possible to Genoa, to give evidence about the child that had been saved, and which was supposed to be Monsieur and Madame Derwent's child. I had been taken ill the day before, and, besides, it would have been impossible for both of us to have left home at the same time. So Ettore took with him Caterina, one of our housemaids, who had attended the rooms the Signori occupied, and knew the child very well. When he came back, of course, my first question was, 'Well, is it the poor Signora's baby that was saved?' '*Sicuro*,' he answered, '*sicuro*'; and that Caterina had been engaged by Madame Gerald as its nurse, and had gone with them to Nice. I knew this was what she wanted. She had been hoping and praying, before she went, that it might be the right child that had been saved, and that she should have the care of it. I asked Ettore if he was quite certain it was the Signora's baby. There had been all the spring several little children in our

house, and I do not think he knew very well one from the other. He laughed and said, 'Why do you bother about it. Babies of that age are all alike, I think; but could there be a doubt when the child had on a night-gown and cap Madame Gerald could swear to, and an A. and a D. upon them as plain as the nose on your face.' When he said this, a queer feeling came over me; for, look you, Signora, when I was on board the steamer with the poor lady, I had seen her take out of a box some of her child's clothes to give to a poor widow, who was going back with her child to her native place, somewhere on the Riviera. It had nothing but rags on, and that touched the lady's heart. Her maid said, I remember, 'Why, surely, ma'am, you are not going to give away one of Miss Annie's night-gowns, which Mrs. Gerald trimmed herself!' but she did, and would see it put on the child before she went to sleep. I think God will have taken her into Paradise for that good deed. But now you see why I was troubled when Ettore said there could be no doubt on the matter, because of the clothes. I told him what I had seen, but it made him angry. He said it was all very well as it was. Madame Gerald was satisfied, and so was everybody. Most likely it was the right child. Indeed, he had no doubt about it. The Signora had given him a handsome sum for his trouble, and he was not going to disappoint her and unsettle her mind. He was a man who did not like trouble—an easy man, you know. I did not think much more about it myself. I had such a bustling, busy life of it at this time, that things went easily out of my head. I had no time to think, from year's end to year's end. But, five years afterwards, Caterina came to Florence in a bad state of health, and when she was dying she sent to speak to me. She was full of remorse at having sworn that the child was the lady's. When she heard

the *padrone* take his oath that it was, she was frightened not to do the same; and then she wished to get the place. Her confessor told her she ought to make the truth known, and so she sent for me. But what could I do? She said she had mentioned something about this to Madame Gerald before she had left England, but that she would not listen, and was so angry that that was the reason of her coming away, though people said it was because of her health. I was beginning to be in trouble then, and did not see her again. She died soon afterwards. We got into great difficulties, and went from place to place, after giving up our hotel. At last my husband died, poor man, and I came to London with an English lady. I have a daughter married to an Englishman. My health failed, and, from one thing to another, I fell into poverty. This London is a bad place for foreigners. I have sometimes thought of asking Madame Gerald for some assistance, but I am ashamed to do so."

Ita said she had only a few shillings to offer her, but she was welcome to them. Madame Ranolfi received them with a grateful smile, and then said, "I do not know what I ought to do. I am glad I have told you all this; but it is, perhaps, of no use. Now my husband is dead, and Caterina dead, perhaps nobody would believe me. Do you think I ought to tell Madame Gerald? The priest I saw yesterday said, that unless I could bring forward some proofs of what I know, I should be careful how I disturbed the minds of several persons on this subject."

"I should think he was right," Ita answered, speaking more calmly than she felt. She could not resist saying, "And so it was my likeness to that poor Mrs. Derwent that made you wish to speak to me at the Home?"

"Yes; I was struck with it at the moment you came

into the room. Ettore used to say that she was like a *salice*, what you call in English a weeping willow. She had that sort of graceful figure on which a shawl hangs prettily, and a small long neck like yours, and soft brown eyes. Every one who saw her said she was *vezzosa* dear. Poor young Signora, I think she must have taken her baby with her to heaven ! "

Everything that had been uttered during that interview had been carefully treasured up by Ita; but she had strictly abstained from saying a word herself which would have confirmed Madame Ranolfi's belief, or induced her to communicate the facts she had stated to others. Her natural quickness made her perceive that at that distance of time it would be exceedingly difficult to disprove Annie's identity and establish her own, even supposing that those most concerned in the case should wish to do so. The whole business—and the existence of a doubt which might never be perfectly solved—would be still more harrassing to Edgar than to herself. As to Mrs. Gerald, she could not judge how far her suspicions had gone, and, therefore, whether further evidence would be a relief, or an additional trial to her. It seemed to her best on the whole, and she was confirmed in this view by the opinion of Father ——, whom she consulted the next morning, to be passive in the matter—to leave it in God's hands, and neither advise nor dissuade Madame Ranolfi from communicating with Mrs. Gerald. It was rather an effort to keep this resolution; for if she should die without stating what she knew, her evidence would be buried with her. She reflected, however, that if the time to speak herself on the subject should come, Edgar would always believe whatever she told him. As to its becoming a legal question, the thought did not enter her mind. After all Annie's generosity and kindness to them, she could not look forward

to such a possibility. Since her return to Holmwood, all this had, of course, been constantly in her thoughts; but as it has already been said, it seemed the very worst moment to speak of it to her husband.

She began to regret her previous reserve. She wished she had insisted on communicating to him her suspicions at Mentone. It would not then have been so difficult to renew the subject, and mention this recent information. In the scene with Annie her heart had swelled a little with the consciousness of what she now believed ought to be their relative positions; but she felt herself too much blessed, too enviable in the possession of what Annie too had looked upon as the most precious of treasures—Edgar's love—even though at that moment a cloud obscured their happiness, to feel anything for her but a tender compassion. "If she had married him, and then this had come to my knowledge, I might have grudged her the possession of Holmwood. But charming and beautiful as Holmwood is, it is but a poor compensation for what I have deprived her of."

Then she was sometimes disturbed by the thought, that she was not justified in withholding this secret from Edgar. Indeed, it had been her confessor's advice that she should take the earliest convenient opportunity to disclose it to her husband. "If Annie should marry," she thought, "and this is more likely now that we shall be going away, and poor Mrs. Gerald not likely to live, it would not be fair to be silent unless I resolved to remain so for ever." Still, as Annie had certainly no such intention at present, there was no reason for hurrying the disclosure on that score. She vaguely resolved to say nothing till they had left Holmwood, but then to lose no time in speaking to Edgar.

When, in the course of the foregoing conversation

with Mrs. Gerald, the latter had asked, "But suppose I had deceived myself?" the question had startled her. She felt as if the crisis of her fate was suddenly come, and an instinctive wish to put it off. She had made no reply, and Mrs. Gerald had not pressed the question further.

Two days afterwards Ita received a letter from Madame Ranolfi, telling her she was in great distress, as her daughter was too poor to support her, and that she entreated her to lay her case before Mrs. Gerald, and solicit from her some assistance. Having no money to give herself, and not liking to apply to her husband, who was about to loose half his income, she felt bound to transmit the petition.

With a faltering voice, she related the position in which she had found this person, and asked Mrs. Gerald if she would do something for her. The name immediately attracted her attention.

"That was the name," she exclaimed, "of the hotel-keeper at Florence who gave evidence as to Annie's identity. I heard that they had both left Florence several years ago. Is he still alive?"

"No, he died some time ago."

"Is she in great distress?"

"Not in the lowest poverty, I think, but very ill off for a person who has known better days."

"I wonder if she knows anything of Caterina, Annie's nurse, who went back to Italy when she was five years old?"

"She is dead."

"Did Madame Ranolfi tell you so?"

"Yes, she did."

"Had she seen anything of her, do you know, since her return?"

"She said she had paid her a visit when she was ill."

"Is this Madame Ranolfi too ill to travel? I should like to see her."

"Oh, you had better not," Ita involuntarily exclaimed.

Mrs. Gerald's face betrayed most violent emotion. But she said, in a calm, dry manner, "And pray why not?"

"It would tire you," Ita said, "and agitate you too much. She would speak of those you have loved and lost."

"Of my brother and his wife?"

"Yes."

After a pause, Ita added, "And, besides, she is too ill, I think, to take a journey."

"Where does she live?"

Ita gave the address.

"I will send her some money," Mrs. Gerald said; and then changed the subject.

On the following Saturday, with a strong effort over himself, Edgar asked his wife if she wished to have a fly to take her to the Roman Catholic chapel at Grantley Manor. She said she would rather drive in her little pony-chaise in which she was accustomed to go long distances alone. It was not the solitary drive she dreaded, but the feeling that it would be the first time she and Edgar would not go to church together, and the last time he would do duty at Holmwood church. He had arranged that the curate who had been there while he was abroad, should return and take charge of the parish till his successor was appointed. This would be perhaps the most painful moment of his life, and she would not be there to comfort and cheer him by that ardent sympathy which she had accustomed him to receive from her at every instant and on every occasion. On the contrary, he would be feeling all the time that but for her he should

never have had that trial to go through. Oh, that persons who are inclined to be hard in their judgment and feelings about converts could know what the pain is of inflicting suffering on those we love—that they could estimate the strength of the convictions which force devoted and tender hearts to grieve the friends they love with ardent affection!

Sometimes people say that those who become Catholics look sad. Sometimes, on the other hand, they are reproached with looking happy when they have caused others sorrow. The truth is, that there is a deep fount of joy in the soul that has found its true home which no amount of suffering can dry up or stop from flowing, but it does not preclude suffering. Persons have smiled at the heavenly consolations poured into their souls amidst the torments of martyrdom, and many a convert looks happy whilst writhing under the severance of ties dearer than life, though not dearer than God. To be banished from home is a sad fate; to be scorned, despised, and unkindly treated, is hard to bear; but the kind looks, the tender sorrow of a mother or husband, the sense of causing grief where it had been the dream of a whole life to give happiness, is a still sharper and more refined trial. Ita felt it in the very depths of her heart's core that Sunday morning when she rode away from the Vicarage after having kissed her husband, but without the courage to utter a single word. He had tried to smile, but the effort had failed. She wondered if he would say words of farewell to his flock. She fancied what Annie would feel during the service, the grief of the parishioners, their indignation against herself; they must think her so much to blame. It was almost difficult at that moment not to blame herself; not for having been true to her faith, but for having ever married Edgar. But, as she

drove on, gradually her mind became more calm. She gazed on the less familiar and most beautiful scenery beyond Holmwood Park with a more peaceful composure. On that tranquil Sunday morning when nature as well as man seemed resting in profound repose, scarcely a breath of air waving the surface of the corn-fields or the foliage of the oaks and beeches, she commended to her Heavenly Father's care all that unknown future which seems so long a vista to those who are beginning life. She reposed on the consciousness of that wonderful love which encircles each human soul and cares for it individually with the minute solicitude of a boundless affection. She felt almost tangibly the support of that belief. It gave her courage to bear even the thought of Edgar's grief. If she loved him so much, what must be the love of the Creator for His creature? When she came in sight of Grantley Manor, it recalled to her the history of a short life which had ended there in the holy peaceful beauty of a slow decline. She remembered hearing that when, on her death-bed, Ginevra Neville received from her husband the assurance that he was resolved to embrace her faith, she had said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," and died with those words on her lips—an enviable end, Ita thought. Mrs. Sydney was standing at the door ready to greet her. Ita had written to her from London and again from Holmwood.

There was no need of words to express what Margaret Sydney felt, as she kissed the flushed cheek of Edgar Derwent's wife, and felt her heart beating against her own—she knew how keen was its suffering, and how intense its joy. She took her into the little church, which stood on one side of the flower-garden, where she and Ginevra had sat so often together. What Ita felt during Mass that day, what thanksgivings rose

from the depths of her heart, what sweet tears filled her eyes, what a sense stole over her of repose in a true mother's arms, it is useless to dwell upon in such a story as this. Some who read it will know more on this point than we can tell them; others will wonder; some may pity and some may sneer. If it should fall into the hands of one hesitating whether to come over from the shadowy region of an imaginary church into the living one beyond, perhaps for him or for her, these few words from one who has crossed the border may not have been written in vain.

Ita was to spend the day at Grantley Manor. She and Edgar had tacitly agreed that this would be better for both of them. She meant to go home after Benediction. To her surprise and pleasure, she found that Mr. Neville was staying with his sister. When the service was over, they all went into the shrubbery, and she then told them that her husband had resigned his living.

Mr. Neville made an exclamation of pleasure, but Mr. and Mrs. Sydney, who knew more than he did of Edgar's reasons, and of the circumstances of the case, guessed how trying to both husband and wife this resolution must be.

"It will be better in the long run, dearest Ita," Margaret said. "I can hardly imagine how he could have remained."

"I was mercifully blinded on that point," she answered. "The effort might have been too great for my strength, if I had been conscious that he would give up his home, without the consolations which I have in leaving it, and through my fault, as it were."

"*Felix Culpa*, as the Church says on Holy Saturday," Mr. Neville observed, with a smile.

Ita thought him a little unfeeling, but he was not so in reality. Only it sometimes happens that those who

have much experience in dealing with aching hearts, know that excessive sympathy is not always the best remedy. He would not let Ita speak in a desponding manner about her husband, and asked where they were going to turn their steps. "The doctors," she said, "want us to go to Malvern. General increase of strength will improve his sight, they say. He has not yet decided on anything, but I hope we shall go there, and then . . . . I have not ventured to propose it yet, but oh, I should like to go back to Mentone for the winter."

"I am afraid he did not like it?"

"At first he did—not afterwards. He got the home, or rather the *Holmwood*, sickness, I think."

There was again a little suppressed sigh. Mrs. Sydney pressed her hand. "I can fancy what the trial is to you on his account."

"Well, and a little on my own too. I do love Holmwood very much, and especially our own little house. We did spend such happy years there! But of course I ought only to be too glad to have something to sacrifice in return for all I have received; but when I see him turning away from the view, from the flowers, from everything about the place as if he could not bear the pain of looking on them, it is almost more than I can endure."

"All that pain is so much treasure," Mr. Neville said. "Do you not know that suffering obtains more even than prayer. It is like money put into your hands wherewith to purchase what you want God to give you."

"That is a new view of suffering," Ita said, smiling.

"No, indeed, a very old one. It dates from the time of our Lord's Passion."

"Edmund will never let any one lament over their sorrows," Margaret said, "but I tell him he is not

logical, for nobody tries so hard to help them out of them."

"That's right, Margaret," Mr. Walter Sydney exclaimed, "I am glad you attack Edmund on that point. He is very inconsistent. I am sure now, that if he could make Mrs. Derwent mistress of Holmwood House to-morrow—without driving poor Miss Annie out, of course—he would set about it directly."

Mr. Neville's eyes met Ita's. It was but for a minute, and she could not have said for sure if there was any meaning in that look. She could not fancy how he could possibly have a suspicion on the subject —unless . . . . it would have been a most strange coincidence, but such things do sometimes happen—he should be the priest whom Madame Ranolfi had seen in London. She could not resist, after speaking of the Rolands, about whom the Sydneys were much interested, casually remarking that she had been with Eliza to see a poor Italian person living near Manchester Square, but she could not perceive that this seemed at all to interest him, and the conversation took another direction.

"It is almost luncheon time," Margaret said, a little while afterwards, and led the way to the house. As they were crossing the flower-garden, the sound of a horse galloping very fast surprised them.

"Who can that be?" Mrs. Sydney exclaimed. Her thoughts turned to Walter's old father, who was at that moment at Heron Castle.

A man on horseback arriving at that rate gave her a misgiving that bad news were at hand. She hurried on before the rest, and met the servant crossing the hall with a letter in his hand.

"It is for Mrs. Derwent," he said, "a messenger has brought it post haste."

The note was from Edgar. It ran thus:

"DEAR ITA,—You had better come back as soon as you can. My poor aunt has been taken suddenly ill—a sort of seizure.—Your affectionate husband,

"E. DERWENT."

Ita read these words, and turned as pale as death.

"Will you have my pony-chaise got ready immediately," she said to Margaret; "Mrs. Gerald is dangerously ill."

"Order the carriage this moment," Mrs. Sydney said to the servant. "I will drive you back," she continued, turning to Ita; "you must not go back alone in this state of anxiety."

Ita nodded assent, and went to the window unable to speak. The Sydneys were surprised at her agitation, and the alteration of her countenance. They had no idea, as they said afterwards to each other, that she was so much attached to Mrs. Gerald. The fact was, that Ita was bewildered with the sudden emotions which these tidings had awakened. She was very fond of Mrs. Gerald. She had always been so, whether it was *la voix du sang*, as the French say, or simply a liking for that cold-mannered, but warm-hearted woman; there was no doubt that she had, from the first, cared much more for her than for Lady Emily Hendon, Annie, or any one else, except Edgar. But, besides the affection which would have in any case made her feel the shock of this announcement, there was much besides that made it agitating. First, the idea that Mrs. Gerald might die without knowing what she herself felt now perfectly sure of, that is, that she was her brother's child—the real Annie—the niece whom she would have loved perhaps, not more than the other Annie, but in a different way; because, instead of meeting with coldness, and an ungenial want of warmth, that love would have been warmly

reciprocated. And then with a not perhaps unnatural inconsistency, though she could not foresee how her identity could be ever established without cruelty to Annie, and that she could not bear to think of, she could not help feeling a sort of despair at the idea that Mrs. Gerald would die without expressing a doubt on the subject of hers and Annie's birth, such as she was convinced she felt.

"Will you put me down at the west lodge-gate," she said to Margaret, as they approached Holmwood. "In five minutes I can run through the grove to the house." She thought Edgar and Annie would, perhaps, be looking out for her, and that they would dislike even the sight of Mrs. Sydney that day. Margaret understood her, and complied with the request.

Edgar was walking up and down the terrace, and came to meet her. "How is she?" Ita gasped out.

"Very ill indeed—quite speechless, but sensible—looks anxious. She has been watching the door: I think it must be you she wants to see."

"I had better go to her at once." As they were passing through the hall, and up the stairs, Ita asked, "How does Annie bear it?"

"She looks ill and scared, but says nothing. She has not left her bedside a minute."

Ita entered gently the darkened room, and knelt down by the side of the bed opposite to where Annie was sitting. The haggard, wan, death-like face of poor Mrs. Gerald was turned towards the door when she came in—a keen look, not of joy, or of pain, but of eagerness appeared in it when she approached. She could not move a limb, nor utter a word, but in her eyes there was still a power of expression, and they fixed themselves wistfully, sometimes, Ita fancied, reproachfully upon her. She could hardly endure that

prolonged, imploring, silent gaze. She bent down over the cold, powerless hand, to hide, as it were, from that piercing look, but, whenever she raised her head, there it was still directed upon her.

Mrs. Gerald never recovered her speech; for a day and a night she lay on her death-bed motionless and silent, and the two beings she had so strangely and differently loved, scarcely ever left her side. Edgar now and then came in and read some prayers. He could not ascertain if she joined in them or not. No one could tell what passed between her soul and God during those lonely hours. Once Ita was left, for a short time, alone with her. The eyes of the dying woman had been closed for awhile as if dozing, when she opened them they had a wild expression, something of a struggle, a desperate effort to speak took place, and then a look of hopeless despondency. Ita knelt close to the pillow, put her head quite near to Mrs. Gerald's, and then said, in a low, distinct voice, "My own, own dear aunt, I love you so much. You have been very good to me. It was not your fault. You could not help it. We shall always love Annie, and remember you with gratitude."

She never knew for sure if these words were heard or understood. She thought a change, a softening expression came into Mrs. Gerald's face. One tear rolled silently down the wan cheek; she went to the other side of the bed, and taking in hers the hand that still retained warmth and life, she kissed it tenderly, and said, "Dearest, you wish to believe all that God has revealed?" her hand was gently pressed. "You hope He will save you because He is goodness itself?" again the feeble pressure was felt. "You love Him because He has loved you, and because of his goodness you repent of all your sins?" More earnestly still the assenting token was given, and Ita blessed God that

He had inspired her to make that simple appeal, and for giving her a hope beyond the grave for that heart which had known so little peace on earth. When the end drew near, and every one in the house gathered round the bed, Ita knelt by Annie's side. Annie had not shed a tear; she seemed turned to stone. Suddenly she rose, and went and stood where Ita generally did, and bending down, looked into her aunt's face. Mrs. Gerald made an effort to lift up the hand she still could move, and Annie placed her head under it. It rested there a moment. Edgar did the same; then the dying eyes seemed to wander in search of some one else, and when Ita approached, the hand was not placed on her head, but took hold of her, and it would not let her go; as long as there was life in it, it kept its hold, and when the last moment came Mrs. Gerald died in Ita's arms.

Like a marble image, Annie sat by the side of the lifeless form, not weeping or moaning, apparently insensible. In vain Edgar spoke to her; she took no notice of him. At last he said to his wife, who was crying bitterly—"Try what you can do; see if you cannot lead her away."

Ita approached, and put her arm round Annie, who gave a violent start.

"Leave me—leave me!" she exclaimed. "You have taken everything from me. The love of all who ever cared for me. All these dreadful hours she was looking at you, not at me. She died with her hand in yours—loving you more than me."

As she said those last words, there was something most painful in the expression of Annie's countenance —jealousy, resentment, almost hatred, breathed in it. This in the chamber of death was terrible; poor girl! She felt it herself. Crossing her arms on her breast, and standing still for a moment, she exclaimed: "My

heart is turned to stone. I feel as if God had forsaken me. Oh, it is horrible to be angry with one who is dead!" Then she fell on her knees and kissed the feet of her whom in her own hard strange way she had loved, and afterwards left the room with a rigid composure, almost more painful than her violence.

CHAPTER XV.

THE day after Mrs. Gerald's decease, as Ita was thinking over that rapid illness and her death, which she could hardly yet realize, it struck her that the night before she had seen, lying on her table, the letter directed to Mrs. Dallas, which she had noticed the morning after her arrival, and another in a bad foreign hand, which she could not help fancying was from Madame Ranolfi. She thought how terrible it would be if Annie came across anything which would suddenly awaken doubts as to her birth. At a time when her heart was frozen, as it were, with grief, and dreadfully sore, it might have a terrible effect upon her. Edgar came into the room at that moment, and they both sat down silently to breakfast.

"I have been to Annie's room," he said. "She is not asleep, but she sits still, refusing to speak or move. She will not eat anything. I am quite anxious about her. Grief, in natures like hers, makes a terrible impression. I do not know what we can do. If we cannot influence her, who would? I hope, however, that these morbid feelings will not last. It did seem to me that my poor aunt showed a preference for you during her illness. There is no accounting for that sort of thing. Sometimes the person most loved seems the least noticed or remembered at such a time."

Ita made no reply; but, after a pause, she said, "Have you or Annie the right to take charge of Mrs. Gerald's letters and papers?"

Edgar seemed surprised at the question. "Why do you ask?" he said.

"Because, dearest, I think . . . . I have some idea that Annie might come suddenly upon some letters that would distress her. I am not quite sure, but I think so."

"Really!" Edgar exclaimed. "You do not mean that my aunt was a Roman Catholic?"

"Oh no. What I mean has nothing to do with religion."

"What has it to do with, then?"

Ita turned her head away. Her cheeks were crimson. She felt the time was come to speak; but it was an immense effort. "I have been in great doubt," she said, "whether I ought to say anything to you about it."

"Is it part of the teaching of your new religion to have secrets which you do not tell your husband?"

This was the first unkind thing Edgar had said to his wife since her return to Holmwood. Many bitter, painful thoughts had been in his mind, but they had not passed his lips. He had strictly schooled his acts and his words, but not his inward emotions; and sorrow, irritation, and perplexity at that moment overcame his self-control. Annie's dogged, bitter grief, his own sorrow at his aunt's death, and Ita's hesitating words and manner, all combined to harass him. Everything that had hitherto made the happiness of his life seemed to fail him. He walked up and down the room, looking gloomy and careworn. Poor Ita was still more wretched. This seemed, again, a bad moment to enter upon a subject on which she had no idea how he would feel. Unless she could explain the cause of her reluctance to broach it, and by what

slow degrees and at what inopportune moments the thought had arisen and grown in her mind, until gradual evidence confirmed it, he would think she had been wanting in openness with him. She could not, however, let that taunt pass unanswered.

"On the contrary," she said, laying her hand gently on his arm, "on the contrary, it is my religion that gives me courage to speak now of what I had not courage to speak of before."

"What on earth are you talking of?" he exclaimed, standing before her with a look of displeasure.

She trembled like a leaf, but felt desperate.

"Edgar, I am not at all sure that I am not your cousin, Mrs. Gerald's niece—the person Annie has been always supposed to be."

She remained with her eyes fixed on the floor, anxiously expecting his next words. His amazement was indescribable. At first he felt afraid that she had lost her senses; but thought travels rapidly over what takes a long time to relate. Two or three circumstances came into his mind, to which he had never attached any importance, but that at once filled him with agitation. Some hints Mrs. Gerald had thrown out, which he did not in the least understand; the marked way in which, almost the last time he had seen her before her illness, she had made him look at Mrs. Derwent's picture; and when he had said, "I have always thought it very like Ita," the way she had stared at him, with a half wistful, half bewildered gaze.

"Come into the garden," he said, quite wildly.

They hurried out of doors, across the terrace, down to the lawn, and into the grove. He held Ita's arm close to his heart. At that moment all estrangement seemed to have disappeared.

"Let us sit down," she said, panting for breath, for he had walked quicker than he knew.

"Tell me everything," he said, "from the earliest moment that thought first came into your mind."

"Well, many things puzzled me long before any suspicion on this point even crossed my mind. I always thought poor Mrs. Gerald's manner to me very odd from my very first acquaintance with her. She used to watch me so much. She was sometimes so kind; but oftener, as if she was keeping me at a distance, and trying not to be fond of me. I was always very fond of her. I do not, of course, mean that that is any proof of what we are speaking of. The first thing that puzzled me was her violent agitation when Annie dressed me up like Mrs. Derwent's picture. I told you, you know, about that at Mentone."

"She never could bear the pictures in her room to be looked at."

"So you said; but she did not only look angry, but so pale and agitated. Then, after Lady Emily's death, her asking me to come and live with her, surprised me very much. But I never had the least idea of what I mentioned just now, till I heard from the priest, at Colla, that a Mrs. Dallas had written to make inquiries of him about the child that Giovanni Piombo had picked up at sea—I mean, about the time and the place where he had found her."

"Did you ever tell her you were brought up at Colla?"

"At Spedaletti, you mean. Yes, I remember her asking me the name of the place I lived at before Lady Emily adopted me. I think I mentioned to you that a poor woman from Mentone——"

"That Mariana . . . ."

"Yes; that she had been to see the same priest, and told him she had lost her child in an accident that had happened near Genoa. He did not recollect the date. I found her out, you know, at Mentone, and

she told me all about that accident, and that she remembered giving her child into the arms of a sailor just as the crash took place, but nothing since for a long time afterwards. She was some years in the hospital at Genoa, but could not tell how long. I could not, therefore, ascertain anything about dates—whether they coincided."

"The only time I ever heard my poor aunt speak of the accident in which my uncle and his wife perished, she said Annie had been saved by a sailor, and that they were the only two living persons she believed that had escaped; but that may have been a mistake. There is something strange in what you tell me, but nothing like proof."

"I have not finished yet. One day that Mariana was talking of her past history, she mentioned to me that there was an English lady, with her husband, on board that steamer, who had been very kind to her, and had given her child some of her own baby's clothes."

"Did she say so?"

"Yes, I asked her if she could tell me how the clothes were marked, but she could not; and then, Edgar . . . . this is the principal thing . . . . I told you of it at Mentone . . . . but, somehow, you were ill, and did not pay any attention to it . . . . but I found in a box in the lumber-room at the villa the clothes I had on when Giovanni Piombo took me into his boat. He sent them with me when I went to live at Lady Emily's, and they are marked A. D. I can show them to you when you like . . . ."

"What! and that woman told you that an English lady had given some of her child's clothes to her baby?"

"Yes."

"But why on earth did not you tell me all this before my aunt's death?"

"I tried sometimes . . . ."

"Tried! nonsense!"

"Then I did not feel at all *sure* till the other day in London."

"What, what happened there?"

"I came across an Italian woman who was at that home you took me to. When she heard my name was Derwent she wished to speak to me. Do you remember the Superioress asking me to talk to one of the patients; she was the mistress of the hotel at Florence, where . . . ." Ita stopped short and burst into tears. "I do not know how to call them, I feel so sure now they were my parents . . . ."

"You must not allow yourself to dwell too much on that thought, Ita," her husband said, greatly agitated himself. "Well, and what did she say about them?"

"That she was so good, so charitable, and only think . . . . that she saw her take out of her trunks, to her maid's great displeasure, some of her baby's clothes, and give them to a poor Italian woman on board the vessel in which she was so soon to perish."

"Is this woman do you say in London?"

"Yes, she is very poor and very ill. She told me also that her husband had been sent for to Genoa to give evidence as to the identity of the child that had been saved from the wreck, and that he had declared it was their child. But she found he had done so without much caring what he said, and chiefly because of the initials on the clothes, and Mrs. Gerald's being so anxious about it. And Caterina . . . ."

"Annie's Italian nurse?"

"Yes, she told Madame Ranolfi on her death-bed that she saw it was not the child, but she would not contradict her master, and she wanted to be engaged as nurse to the baby."

"And why did she tell you all this and not to my aunt?"

"She seemed in great doubt as to what was her duty. She did not know if Annie was not Annie, who was being wronged. You see she had no idea that the real child could be living. She said the priest whose advice she had asked said she ought to find out to whom the property would have gone supposing *their* child had died. She asked me that question, and I said to you."

"Or rather to you if the truth can be ascertained," Edgar interrupted.

"Oh no, if anything is discovered, if Annie is Mariana's child, it had better be as if I had died, and nothing said about me. It would break her heart to give up Holmwood to me but not to you. But I was forgetting to tell you something more, which possibly might be of importance. Poor Mariana, when we were speaking about my having been found at sea (I never said anything to her about Annie, I thought it more prudent not), asked to look at my shoulder. She said her child had a mark from an accident which the doctors said would always remain. There was no trace of it on my shoulder. Of course it might have disappeared . . . . but supposing Annie had it . . . ."

"My aunt should have known all this," Edgar exclaimed.

"You see, Edgar, I dared not come here that day when you were all so displeased with me, and you so sorry for Annie, and say that, perhaps, I ought to be where she is."

"I am not at all sure what ought to be done," Edgar exclaimed. "We owe so much to poor Annie."

He fixed his eyes on his wife, and all sorts of thoughts passed through his mind. He was struck with her paleness; her sweet anxious face; the wistful gentle-

ness with which she seemed to await his decision, ready to forego every worldly advantage at his desire, content to abide by his decision.

"I am not at all sure that it could be proved," he said, "any part of it; and even if it were possible that we could ever try legally to dispossess Annie."

"Oh no, never, never," Ita exclaimed.

"And yet," he replied, "if we had children it might be our duty. Annie might be completely estranged from us, she may marry, and the inheritance of my family, which for centuries has been ours, would go to aliens. And if we do not speak now, we can never raise again the question."

Ita had felt a little his saying *my* family, not *ours*. She would gladly never have been recognized by any one else, but she would have liked him to have given a tacit proof that he thought she was his uncle's child. But these refined distinctions were not in his nature. He was not, as we have often said, selfish or egotistical, two very different though kindred defects; but he was engrossed by his own thoughts and feelings—generous, good, honest ones—but riding somewhat roughly through the sensitive fibres of a more delicate organization.

"Whatever were your reasons—your feelings rather," he said, "and I certainly can understand them, it is much to be regretted that you did not disclose all this before Mrs. Gerald's death."

"I cannot help thinking, and this makes me very unhappy, that she may have heard some part of it in a sudden manner. I saw lying on her table, the day she was taken ill, a letter written in a foreign hand, with a London postmark; and I am almost sure the handwriting was Madame Ranolfi's. I had one from her myself a short time ago, and had seen one before that directed to Mrs. Dallas. That is what I meant

just now about your taking possession of the letters . . . . Annie might find and read something which might puzzle and frighten her about all this."

"True; you are right. She is resting now—asleep, her maid hoped. We could go gently into my poor aunt's sitting-room. I think, as her nephew, I have quite as good a right as Annie to the possession of her papers, which I will lock up, and not look at, till by her will we find out to whom they properly belong. God is my witness, I do not take this step to secure these letters in my own interest."

Ita smiled; the idea had not even occurred to her.

"Come," he said, "let us see at once about it." They walked towards the house; as they passed the church, he sighed, and said, "Ita, if you are my cousin, you have forsaken the Church of your baptism."

She laid her head on his arm; even that reproach was better than his mournful silence. 'Dearest," she murmured, "does not the uncertainty of my fate in that respect demonstrate the fallacy of that theory?"

"Ita, I cannot bear this barrier between our hearts."

"Nor I," she exclaimed, burying her face in his breast. "But you must come on to me. I can never go back. Edgar, I could as soon kill myself."

"Do you feel that *really—truly?*"

"God knows I do," she murmured.

"Well, may He enlighten whichever of us is mistaken!" Edgar exclaimed, with a good deal of emotion, as they entered the house.

They went quietly upstairs, passed Annie's bedroom, and heard from her maid that she was still sleeping. Passing through Mrs. Gerald's bed-room, they knelt together by the side of the cold inanimate form. Both of them, as they prayed there, thought of the long, anxious, unquiet years during which she had endured an inward strife they could now begin to

understand; and none but God would ever know what had passed in that restless mind during the hours when the power of speech had fled, when intercourse with those who stood around her was denied. Silent she had lived, and silently she had died. Was her memory impaired during that time? Did mental oppression obliterate the bitter traces of over-anxious doubts? or did they work their way into the soul with despairing clearness, while the lips were closed and the hand motionless? Ita had seen a tear roll down that worn cheek. She had seen a look she never could forget fixed upon her, turned upon her with an unspeakable earnestness. She had given in answer to that look a pledge, and it was in accordance with that pledge she had opened her heart to her husband.

"Let us promise here," she whispered to him, "to be a true brother and sister to Annie."

He squeezed her hand; they rose together, and went into the other room.

The drawers of the bureau were unlocked, and several letters and papers lying on the table—amongst them the one Ita had noticed the previous day. Edgar swept them all together into a half-open drawer, locked it, and was taking out the key, when the door of the room opened, and Annie came into the room. Both Edgar and Ita were startled at her sudden appearance. They felt as if they were doing something wrong, though their only object was kindness to her. She noticed their embarrassment. She saw the key in Edgar's hand. A livid, deadly paleness overspread her face. It had a sort of wild beauty they had never seen in it before. Her eyes were lighted up with a strange fire. She stood staring at them as if some powerful emotion was vainly striving to find vent in utterance at last.

"So you have come," she said, "to take possession

of her letters, of all that belonged to her, but you shall not have them. You shall have nothing that was hers. I gave *him* up to you," she said, turning to Ita, and pointing to Edgar. "But I never gave up *her* love. I never gave it up, though I did not seem to value it. She never knew how much I loved her. You came and stood by her death-bed, and had her last look of affection. Go away—go away, Ita, and you too, Edgar; I do not care for either of you. I am alone now. I will live here alone, and die alone; but everything in this room is mine. Nobody shall take a scrap of paper or an old pen from that table—give me that key."

Edgar felt distracted. If in that frame of mind she read the letters he had locked up, it might almost affect her mind. And yet, as it was only a supposition, he could scarcely act upon it. He looked at Ita in despair, then he said, "My own dear Annie, it is right that dearest Mrs. Gerald's papers should be locked up till her will is read. Then we shall know who has a right to take care of them."

"No one has any right to them but me. Give me that key."

The thought crossed Edgar's mind whether it was possible that Annie did know anything of these particular letters. If so, he would not have hesitated to give up at once to her the possession of the bureau. What he dreaded was a sudden discovery; and yet how to prepare her mind at such a moment for a possible disclosure, and one which it would be cruel, perhaps, in any case to make, but certainly so if it was presented to her mind only in the shape of a painful doubt.

At last, as she was becoming every moment paler, and a deep red spot crimsoning on her cheek, he placed the key in her hand and said, "Here it is, dearest

Annie. I know you will feel yourself bound in honour not to examine the contents of those drawers till the will has been read."

She sat down with the key in her hand, and large tears rolled down her cheek.

"Go away, dearest," Edgar whispered to his wife. "Perhaps if I am alone with her, I can soothe her."

Ita, as she passed by Annie, did not venture to kiss her, but pressed her lips on her sleeve. Her arm was hanging helplessly by the side of the chair in which she had sunk.

"Annie, do try and pray."

"No," she said abruptly. "My head is confused, I cannot pray."

"Shall I pray with you?"

"No, no. I do not know what is right or what is wrong. *She* thought one way, you another, Ita another.

"But there is one thought in which we all agree. God is our Father, and Jesus our Saviour. You can raise up your heart to God—you can call on our Lord."

"No; if God was my Father, He would show me what is right. I have never had much comfort in religion. I have not a pious nature. I am not like Ita, or Eliza, or Mrs. Sydney. I wanted to be taught what was true, as Mr. Pratt used to teach me, and to have no doubts. Poor old man—poor old man!"

How often, when the heart is aching with some great recent blow, it turns to some simple, old, long-buried affection, and calls on one in the grave with a strange self-pitying yearning.

Edgar did not know what to say or do. He longed to comfort, but felt powerless in the presence of that simple, unimaginative, despairing grief.

Annie said, after a pause, "You had better leave me. You have your wife. She takes you away from

Holmwood, but with her you will be happy everywhere."

"But, dearest Annie, what will you do? who will be with you?"

"Nobody; that is what I want. I could not make you, and I could not make *her*, happy. I can never make any body happy. I mean to live alone."

All that was wild and almost fierce in her countenance had passed away. Only an intense dejection, a look of hopeless despondency remained. "Good-bye, Edgar," she gently said. "I am glad we are once more alone. I am glad your wife went away, for I can no longer love her. I loved her for your sake. I loved her as long as she made you happy. But now she has robbed *you* of your happiness, and she robbed me of *her* love, and I hate her."

"Oh, Annie, Annie, do not say that. If you knew . . . ."

"What! are you not broken hearted because she has turned Catholic? And did not *she* gaze on her and not on me in her last moments?"

"Ita could not help it."

"Oh yes, you find excuses for her; you love her, and I am glad you do. There is nothing so dreadful as not to love—to have nothing to love . . . . I am glad you love her."

"We both love you, Annie, and you loved us."

"I tried," she said.

There was something so sad, so melancholy, so full of meaning in those two words, that Edgar felt his heart sink within him. He kissed Annie's hand and went away.

The Vicarage and its pretty smiling garden were lighted up by the evening sun, the dew drops glittering on each blade of grass and trembling leaf. Holmwood spreading out its lawns and forest in their full

summer beauty. The birds flying about among the old trees of the churchyard. Edgar looked on the whole scene with a new extraordinary feeling. There was little doubt now, in his mind, as well as in Ita's, that she was the child who should have inherited those broad lands, that fair domain. But it seemed hopeless that this should be ever recognized short of taking steps he could hardly conceive would be successful, even if he had made up his mind they would be right or desirable. And they were going to leave behind all this beauty, all this peace—even the duty of watching over that lonely, friendless girl, the innocent occupant, perhaps, of a position she had no right to, leave her alone with her wealth, her sad, angry thoughts, her vague unbelief—and all because Ita would be a Catholic. He tried to rouse himself again to indignation, but the awful realities of death, the scenes they had gone through together, the nearness with which their hearts had throbbed side by side, the difficulties of the present, the mysterious future, had imparted a different spirit to his dream. He could not re-awaken his indignation, not in the same measure, at least. Though the sight of many things about his house made him sad, and recalled to his mind that, after the funeral, they would soon depart to return no more to that blissful home, he did not grieve for himself half as much as for Annie. Ita was there, and that was the *sine qua non* of his earthly happiness. And she did feel and act so nobly. She was so thoroughly good. He could not hate her religion quite so intensely as he had done —that strange religion so strangely adapted to every need and every craving of the human soul. Perhaps he had arrived at the point where Dr. Newman was when he exclaimed, "Would that thy creed were sound, O Church of Rome, for thou dost soothe the heart."

Perhaps as he began to notice the difference of ex-

pression in the face which had long been anxious, sad, and wistful, though always gentle, and saw that even in the midst of sorrow there was in it an unmistakable expression of peaceful serenity, he mentally resigned himself to the lot she had chosen for herself and for him. Perhaps he felt that if God had shown her what He had not made clear to him, and since she had had the courage to go forward alone, that it might not be after all such a curse and a misery. If Annie had been less desolate he would not have been very unhappy that evening. What he had heard from his wife that day occupied him very much. He was at a loss how to act, but at last determined after the funeral was over to go to London and see Madame Ranolfi. From her at least he might gather sufficient evidence to satisfy his own mind on the question of Annie's, and possibly of Ita's, identity. Her undoubted resemblance to Mrs. Derwent's picture, considering the corroborating circumstances, appeared to him conclusive. He had the greatest desire to show that picture to persons unconcerned on the subject. But there seemed no possible means of effecting this. Ater the coffin had been removed from the bed-room to an apartment on the ground floor, he stole upstairs one afternoon to look at it himself, but he found the door locked; the housekeeper who had seen him trying to open it, said, "Miss Derwent has got that key, sir, and also the one of the dressing-room. She goes in there herself, but nobody else does."

This might be a natural fear of interruption and a desire to nurse her grief in secret, but it was possible, just possible, that she was looking over the letters in the bureau—possible that she had found in them something bearing on her own fate—possible that she looked anxiously at that picture which four years ago she had said was so like Ita. She would remember also, he

thought, the incident of the turban and Mrs. Gerald's agitation. Had she read the letters? Was she studying the picture in connection with them? What were Annie's thoughts?

She would not see Ita at all, and as little of him as she could help. She pointedly made all the arrangements for the funeral without his aid and assistance, consulting her agent and her steward. She took her meals alone, and never came to the Vicarage. She did not actually refuse to admit him when he asked to see her, but his efforts at consolation were vain. She was looking wretchedly ill, and he would not keep out of his mind whenever he saw her, the words, "The iron has entered into her soul."

But what had driven it in? did she suspect, did she know, did she dread anything? The doubt was tormenting, and he saw no means of solving it. He could not but consider it just possible that in Mrs. Gerald's will there might be some allusion to the subject. Perhaps some statement, perhaps some directions that the subject should be investigated. And yet it would be more likely that she should have left a private letter to him than that she should have made public any doubt that might have lately occurred to her. Six days had now elapsed since her death; the funeral was to take place on the morrow. It had been necessary to invite Mr. and Mrs. Langdon to the Vicarage—a heavy aggravation to his trouble and annoyance. They had never been at Holmwood House, for Mrs. Gerald did not care to see them, and only once before at his cottage since he had married Ita. Their attending her funeral was therefore, mere form, and he felt it would aggravate Annie's sufferings by adding to them the embarrassment of seeing persons who were almost strangers to her at such a time. Then he had been obliged to write to his mother that Ita had become a

Catholic, and it would be difficult to keep from her his own resolution to resign his living, and his prospects of preferment in the Church of England.

Her lamentations, and Mr. Langdon's comments on the subject, he dreaded with a keen sensitiveness; and not without reason, at any rate, as regarded Mrs. Langdon's feelings. He was fond of his mother, and she doted upon him, but since his earliest childhood there had been little sympathy between them. His happiest days had always been spent at Holmwood. Mrs. Gerald and Annie had stood to him far more in the position of his own family than his mother and her husband. He seemed to pay visits at Lowndes Square, and to come home to Holmwood. His heart was full just then, his mind oppressed with various and anxious thoughts. Never had he been so little disposed for conversation. Though considerably better in health since his return to England, he was not yet strong, and there was still about him a degree of nervous irritability he could not shake off. Ita felt just as he did, but discomfort and anxiety are better endured by women than by men. The latter can face danger and pain, but uneasiness sits heavily on them.

Now that a subject so full of importance, so deeply interesting, had been broached between them, Edgar and Ita could talk of little else; and he kept continually forgetting his displeasure against her. She was so exactly, he thought, what she ought to be, under the circumstances—feeling intensely for Annie, but also for him. They looked on everything about them in a different way. They discussed a great deal the possibility of the truth coming out without their stirring in it—wondered what Annie would feel if such a thing were to happen. He made her describe over and over again, Mariana's appearance, and then recall her own youthful recollections. The topic that he had most

avoided and disliked became the most intensely interesting to him. If it had been possible for Edgar to think his wife more charming and attractive than he had always done, the romance which this singular disclosure threw over her birth and her fate would have increased the fascination. The hours he spent alone with her those days were his only comfort. They were both very unhappy about Annie. The servants reported that she ate scarcely at all, and sat the whole day in what had been Mrs. Gerald's apartments. She spoke to no one. "Her eyes look too large for her face;" "and she is growing so thin," the housekeeper said.

"Ita!" Edgar exclaimed, after they had heard this, "does she suspect? does she think or know anything? Is not this great dark grief otherwise unaccountable? Is there a struggle going on in her mind?"

"I cannot guess, but you know I have always thought Annie's a very jealous nature. And she was always jealous of Mrs. Gerald's affection, though she seemed cold to her."

"But could a jealous person have acted towards us as she did?"

"Yes; I think so. Her great love for you was stronger than even her jealousy of me. I cannot help thinking that she feels now that she was always cold to the one person who most cared for her, and that that heart which had been so devoted was estranged at last. That could account, I think, for her depression. But, oh! how sad it is to think of her *there*—*there*, in that room, alone—with no comfort, no faith, no object to live for . . . . And how terrible it will be if she refuses to see us—if she continues in this state!"

"We cannot go away and leave her here alone. What can we do?"

At that moment the fly containing Mr. and Mrs.

Langdon was heard rumbling on the road, and in a few minutes they arrived. She had a *visage de circonstance*, which varied in its character according as it was meant to refer to Mrs. Gerald's death or Ita's change of religion.

"I cannot trust myself to speak of my feelings," she said on entering the drawing-room, and she kept down her veil, afraid of not looking as sorrowful or as indignant as each occasion required.

Mr. Langdon was particularly kind in his manner to Ita, but talked in a way that made her more uncomfortable than ever. Every word he uttered was gall and wormwood to Edgar, and he kept asking her questions which she was obliged to answer, though she would have given anything to remain silent. In despair she led him into the garden, and left the mother and son together.

"My dear Edgar," she began, "this is a dreadful blow."

"My poor aunt's death?"

"Yes, of course, but it is still sadder about your wife. I suppose it must have been in the blood."

"No," he answered, shortly, "not at all in the blood, I think."

"But it is otherwise so unaccountable."

"No, I do not think so. I am very sorry—nobody can be more so—that she has seen it in that light, but I have no doubt Ita has acted conscientiously."

"I am really tired of hearing of people's consciences. They seem to make them do no end of wrong and foolish things. How shall you manage here with a Roman Catholic wife?"

"I shall not manage at all, I have resigned the living."

"And you mean to live on £300 a year. Good heavens! what folly! and is it true that Miss Derwent

is so angry with Margaret that she will never again do anything for you? Of course she will marry, if only out of spite, and she will be quite right. I should do it if I was her. And now there is Mr. Langdon catching cold out of doors. No, you had better not call him in, but just take him his comforter. How has Mrs. Gerald left her fortune?"

"We shall know it to-morrow when her will is opened."

"If she has not left it to you, I can never forgive your wife."

"No, of course, that circumstance would make her conversion at once a perversion," Mr. Langdon remarked, having heard his wife's emphatic declaration as he came into the room, comforter in hand.

Neither Ita nor Edgar could endure this sort of conversion. The subject was too sore and too sacred a one to bear such handling; but it was what Dr. Johnson wished the young lady's sonata to be, not difficult but impossible, to check that *vieillard terrible* from talking of whatever he liked.

In the middle of the evening he growled out, after staring a moment at Ita, "What colour do you call your eyes, Mrs. Derwent?"

"Brown, I suppose," she answered, looking up from her work, the light of the lamp shining full on her face.

"I never saw any at all like them," he persisted, "except those of Mrs. Robert Derwent, Miss Derwent's mother. I had once to contribute something to her album when she was Miss Maud Ardon, and I wrote a poem beginning, 'Her eyes are like no other eyes.'"

Ita coloured and bent hers down on her cross-stitch. "Will it all be ever known?" she thought.

Mr. Langdon went on talking of the time when he had met Miss Ardon at a country house in Yorkshire. Then he asked how Annie was.

Edgar answered, "Not well, and in great affliction."

"No wonder," Mrs. Langdon ejaculated; "every kind of sorrow has come upon her at once."

"Mrs. Derwent had better convert Miss Annie," her husband observed. "Then she might be a nun. That would suit all parties. Would it not, Mrs. Langdon? It would save you the trouble of wondering so often if Miss Derwent will ever marry."

The evening was not a pleasant one. It was a relief, at least to some of the party, when it was time at a reasonable hour to go to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

The funeral was over. It had been quite private; only a few old friends and neighbours were present. Amongst them were Lord and Lady Carsdale, Mr. Hendon, and, rather to Edgar's surprise, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Sydney. Annie had ordered that they should be invited. Mrs. Sydney had called several times on Mrs. Gerald during her illness, and those visits seemed to please the invalid. He supposed, when he heard this, that it was on that account she had wished them to be asked.

After everybody else had driven away, Edgar shook hands with the Sydneys; and while he was speaking to Walter Sydney, Ita had time to say a few words to Margaret. She told her that, as far as regarded her husband, she was much happier than on the first days after her return. That a common sorrow and a common anxiety had broken down the reserve between them.

"Your sorrow I can well understand," Margaret answered; "but is there any new cause for anxiety?"

"About Annie," Ita replied, and then described the state she had been in since Mrs. Gerald's death. "It is so distressing," she added, "we do not know what to do. Edgar will not remain here and she does not say a word about our staying with her. Yet we cannot bear to go away, and leave her so utterly desolate."

"Perhaps she hardly thinks of anything yet. A first sorrow has sometimes a bewildering effect on the mind. But could you not persuade your husband to come and stay some time with us before you make any further plans? You would still be near Miss Derwent."

"I should like it so much, so very much," Ita answered; "but I doubt his accepting your kind invitation. But I will speak to him about it, and let you know."

"When is Mrs. Gerald's will to be opened?"

"This afternoon, I believe."

"Dearest Ita," Margaret said, in a hesitating manner, "I suppose you expect . . . . I mean, you have reason to expect that she has left her fortune to your husband . . . ."

"I should have almost made sure of it some time ago, but everything has been so changed lately . . . . I do not know how far she was annoyed at my conversion. Not very much, I think. Indeed, I fancied she had some faint desire to know more of our religion; but perhaps at first she was angry, and it occurred to me that the wistful look—a painfully wistful look—she kept turning on me after she had lost her speech, and was paralyzed, might be caused by something she had done, and perhaps wished undone. I hope not; I hope it is all right. I am not heroic. I *cannot* wish to have deprived him of *everything*."

Ita burst into tears. Mrs. Sydney looked at her anxiously.

"Will you promise me one thing?"

"What?"

"If it should prove a strange, perplexing, painful will, do not be too unhappy about it."

"I will try not. You must pray for me."

They kissed, and Mrs. Sydney went away. There was a heavy cloud on her bright and still lovely face.

In the afternoon, the family assembled in the library, for the opening and reading of Mrs. Gerald's will. Annie and Ita sat side by side on the same couch, both in deep mourning: Annie's face perfectly colourless, and her eyes fixed on vacancy with a stern calmness; her hands were folded together, and resting listlessly on her knees. Ita, on the contrary, was flushed, and there was an appearance of nervous excitement in her countenance and her frequent changes of attitude: her colour went and came, and she glanced sometimes at her husband, who, almost as motionless as Annie, stood leaning with his back to the fireplace; sometimes at Mrs. Langdon, who was in a very restless state of mind; and sometimes at the lawyer, who was about to read the will, and who knew its contents, which gave him a momentary interest in her eyes. Poor Ita, she tried hard to be very good, and not to care too much about the money; but she was not stoical. Edgar was in delicate health. He had given up his profession because she had become a Catholic. She could not help feeling very anxious. If they were tolerably well provided for, she could easily make up her mind, should Edgar think it right, never to raise the question of her birth, but to be all their lives dependent on Annie for everything beyond bare subsistence. She could hardly face the thought with courage. All this passed through her mind during the brief moment while the will was unsealed. The con-

tents of it were short and simple. She bequeathed her furniture, books, pictures, plate, and jewels to her niece, Annie Derwent, and her fortune—that is, a sum of twenty thousand pounds—to her nephew, Edgar Derwent. This was all right—what every one had expected. Ita breathed a deep sigh of gratitude. Mrs. Langdon fanned herself. Edgar glanced at his wife. Annie seemed to take no notice.

"But there is a codicil," the lawyer said; and this codicil, made and signed a few days before her illness, revoked all previous provisions, and left everything the testatrix possessed to Mr. Walter Sydney.

Annie started. Mrs. Langdon groaned, her husband shrugged his shoulders. Ita became crimson, and looked at Edgar in an amazed, bewildered manner. There was nothing more to be said or done. The lawyer rose.

Edgar went up to him and said, "You will, of course, give notice as soon as possible to Mr. Sydney of the contents of the will?" Then approaching Annie, he began, "Dearest Annie, this is unexpected. . . ."

"I have left off expecting anything or caring for anything," she answered. "Perhaps you will give the necessary orders that everything that belonged to my aunt may be packed up and sent . . . . Oh, Edgar," she suddenly cried, "why did she do this?"

"Come with me, Annie," he said; "come with me into the next room. Let us talk about it."

He was excited, and proposed this, scarcely knowing what he should say if she consented; but she hastily drew away her hands, which he had seized, and dashed them across her eyes to hide the tears that were filling them, and rushed out of the room. Edgar fell on the sofa, and hid his face with his arms. His wife sat down by his side, close to him, not venturing to speak. The same idea was in both their minds. They

had a vague suspicion that this extraordinary will must be in some way connected with Mrs. Gerald's recent knowledge or suspicion of the facts which had come to their own knowledge. But what the consequences would prove, what the effect would be on Annie of this new wound to her feelings, they could not imagine or foresee. They intensely longed to be by themselves; both had a terror of hearing Mrs. Langdon speak. But they could not remain where they were, they must make a move. Edgar rose and said, "We had better go now. Only I should like to make one more attempt to see Annie." He wrote her a note and sent it up to her room—

"DEAREST ANNIE,—Do let me or Ita see you. It makes me so unhappy that you will shut yourself up."

In a moment the servant returned with this one:—

"DEAREST EDGAR,—Believe me it is not unkindness. At this moment I could not be unkind to you. But I can only bear things when I am alone. People are different, you know."

"There is nothing for it," he murmured, and led the way out of the room.

As soon as they were outside the house, Mr. Langdon exclaimed, "Well, if that good lady's intention was to surprise and puzzle the world after her death, she has succeeded."

Mrs. Langdon, who was quivering with indignation, and grieved with natural sorrow, answered with a violent calmness, "I am not the least surprised, and not the least puzzled."

"Good Heavens!" Edgar inwardly exclaimed, "does she suspect anything?" And he turned round rather anxiously awaiting her next words.

"It is as clear as the day!"

"Then she knows nothing," he thought.

"You said last night, when we were surprised at those people having been asked to the funeral, that Mrs. Walter Sydney"—the emphasis with which the name was uttered was quite terrific—"had been often with your poor aunt during her illness. I have not the slightest doubt on my mind that she made her secretly a Roman Catholic, and persuaded her to leave them her fortune, that she may make it over to the priests. It is just what they all do. It is exactly what one might have expected."

"But if she wanted to enrich the Papists," Mr. Langdon observed, "she might as well have made Mrs. Derwent her heir."

"No, the priests would not then have had it. But, Edgar, of course you will contest the will. A codicil made just before a person is taken ill, and her having had a paralytic stroke, too, and lost her speech, and such a will as that—of course it could never stand. She must have been out of her mind. Indeed, for her sake I am sure I hope so. I did not see her often; but it always struck me there was something very odd about her. I hope this will be a lesson to you, my dear Margaret. It is an awful instance of the power and cunning of your priests."

This sort of conversation, or rather soliloquy, went on all the rest of the day. The husband and wife could scarcely escape a minute from poor Mrs. Langdon's presence. Ita felt painfully her mother-in-law's remarks; but it was an immense, unspeakable comfort that her own secret was now known to Edgar, and that the shafts, whether at random sent, or pointed towards herself, were warded off by the sense of his sympathy. The suspense, however, was most trying. Only twice they got away alone—once into the garden, and once to her room at dressing time. On the former occasion,

he had just begun saying, "My love, I cannot but think . . . ." and she was hanging breathlessly on his lips to hear what he did think, when steps were heard behind them, and Mrs. Langdon rushed into the shrubbery with a newspaper in her hand.

"My dear boy" (it always tried Ita that she would call her great grown-up son, a man of twenty-eight, her boy), "I have just seen this account in the 'Standard,' of the way in which a Romish priest in France induced a Jewish girl to become a Papist. It shows what they can do."

"My dear mother," Edgar impatiently exclaimed, "there is not the slightest reason to believe that my poor aunt died a Roman Catholic; and whatever may have been the cause of her making this extraordinary will, the Sydneys are not people that can be suspected of interested plotting in the matter."

"I do not see that at all. They may not want money themselves, though there is nobody too rich not to care for more. But they will give it to build churches and convents. To think of poor Mrs. Gerald having been so foolish—so wickedly foolish! It makes me quite afraid of what one might do oneself. The pictures, too—all the pictures of her own relatives—to go and leave them to strangers. I wonder how she can rest in her grave."

This sort of talk went on as long as the walk round the shrubbery lasted, only interrupted by inefficient efforts on the part of Edgar to check its flow.

"Well, the longest day comes to an end," he said to his wife, as he passed through her room before dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Langdon were to return to London by the eight o'clock train the next morning. They neither of them could understand the feelings of the young couple, and this was natural enough. It did really seem above human nature that they should not

be more indignant or distressed at the terrible disappointment they had experienced, and should not utter one word of resentment, or even amazement, at Mrs. Gerald's unaccountable, and apparently unjust testamentary disposition.

"Do you really think, Mr. Langdon, Edgar will not dispute the will?" she said, as they drove in the pony-chaise to the station.

"I am like poor Miss Derwent, he answered, lifting up his eyebrows, "I have left off thinking at all."

After the early breakfast, and the departure of their parents, Edgar and Ita, with a strange sense of relief, set themselves, on the contrary, to think as hard as they could, half to themselves and half aloud. For all their thoughts did not turn on the same subject, Ita revolved in her mind the possibility of what Mrs. Langdon had so indignantly concluded. Perhaps Mrs. Gerald *had* wished, had intended, to be a Catholic. Perhaps, the wistful, appealing look, so constantly fixed upon her, had been the expression of that desire. She remembered, with a thrill of grateful joy, the pressure of her poor thin hand when she had asked her if she believed whatever God had revealed to His Church; but she questioned if she ought not to have said more, and done more, and hoped more, for that departing soul. Alas! how often we have to go over, in remembrance, scenes in which, if we could be placed in them again, we think we should act differently. This may be sometimes true, but as often not. No one is safe from these misgivings; but may we not trust that, where the whole desire of our souls has been to do right, He will have made all things, even our own mistakes, our blindness, our folly, perhaps, subservient to His purposes of mercy? Ita wondered that Margaret Sydney had not spoken to her, on the Sunday she spent with her, of her frequent visits to

Mrs. Gerald. She longed immensely to see her on every account. Edgar's thoughts ran anxiously on the future. He could not but believe that Mrs. Gerald's will had been made in consequence of doubts as to the real state of the case as regarded Ita and Annie, and that, foreseeing the impossibility of investigating the point at issue before her death, she had confided those doubts to the Sydneys, and left her property as a trust in their hands.

After a long silence, he broke on Ita's thoughts by exclaiming, "Of course, if she foresaw that you would ever be acknowledged to be the rightful possessor of Holmwood, she must have wished to leave her fortune to Annie. But what will be the next step?"

"Do you still mean to go to London and see Madame Ranolfi?"

"I am inclined to do so. It seems to me that we ought to get together all the evidence we can, and then form a decision."

"Mrs. Sydney asked me yesterday if we would not both come to Grantley Manor for a while. I said I would speak to you about it and let her know; but at this moment it would be, I suppose, very embarrassing, even if you had no objection . . . ."

"I could not go there under any circumstances," Edgar quickly replied. He was conscious that his misery about Ita's change of religion was less keen, and that he was beginning to care about it much less than at first. In spite of himself, other anxieties and cares, he scarcely allowed himself to call them hopes, blunted the edge of what had at first seemed so acute. But when it was proposed to him to go and stay at Grantley Manor, he felt he must make a stand.

"You might have gone there whilst I was in London," he added, "if it had not been for this complication. The whole state of affairs is so strange, what

with what we know and what we do not know, that it quite bewilders one. And that dear, dear one there—our poor Annie . . . . for whom I have such a strong affection . . . . Oh, my own Ita, will others ever know who she is and who you are!"

This was said with all his old tenderness. The tight feeling in her heart was loosened. The joys of other days beamed in her eyes; she rested her head on his shoulder; she looked at the view of Holmwood House, and at the windows of Annie's solitary home, that home she had once reckoned on sharing with Edgar. How could she ever make amends to that poor lone being? Surely not by driving her from that very home.

"Oh! God will find a way out of it!" she exclaimed, with a sort of childish faith which made her husband smile. He had guessed what had passed through her mind.

"Oh, I hope this is not somebody coming to call here at this hour," she exclaimed, when, as the stable clock was striking eleven, a carriage was heard driving up to the door.

Edgar looked out of the window. "It is Mrs. Sydney," he said, and both felt a little agitated.

Margaret Sydney was one of those persons to whom God has given one of His best and highest natural gifts—a sunny, sweet temper; and His Holy Spirit had engrafted upon that charming nature its fruits of charity, joy, benignity, and goodness. In youth her presence had been a sunbeam; in maturer age it had ever proved a light in darkness to the sorrowful, a sheltering cover to the helpless. The gladsome spirits that had made Grantley Manor and Heron Castle ring with merriment in former days, had been subdued, never saddened. She had been happy as the day is long with her old Walter—the chosen husband of her

heart; she had borne away from the death-bed of her sister Ginevra the Catholic faith, that well-spring of happiness which does not ebb with age; and she had gone on her way rejoicing through the sunshine and clouds of many a long year, "her children rising up and calling her blessed, and her husband praising her." Wherever she went, peace seemed to follow—whatever she did seemed to prosper.

As she came into the little drawing-room of the Vicarage, there was a kindness in her glance, something in her manner which conveyed sympathy without expressing it, that at once dispelled the embarrassment of those she came to see. They felt there was nothing but good-will in that heart. Ita thought she would be "the way out of it" God would find. She sat down by her, and Edgar stood near them.

"Do sit down," she said, "we have so much to talk about. I have so much to tell you."

First she gave them an account of the intimacy which had sprung up, whilst they were in Italy, between her and Mrs. Gerald. "She liked me to come and see her very often, and always talked to me a great deal about you." This she said turning to Ita, whose heart was beating fast.

"She was very fond of you . . . ." Margaret hesitated, and looked earnestly at Ita, who turned red and then pale. "Ever since she had known you she thought you like a picture in her room? . . . . Do you know the one I mean?"

Edgar had turned away, and stood at the window with his back to them. Margaret put her arm round Ita's waist, drew her close to herself, and said, "Do you at all guess what else she fancied?"

"Oh yes, we know about it. You need not be afraid to speak," Ita answered, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Well, then, I will at once tell you that she had been long tormented by the consciousness of this extraordinary likeness, and since she heard from Lady Emily where you were found in infancy, the impression grew so strong that she could never shake it off again, and it made her quite miserable. I feel that I am at liberty to tell you now all that she said to me in confidence; for the last time we ever met, her last words to me were, 'If I should die suddenly, do as you think right about making use of all I have told you.' Well, there had been in her mind a misgiving throughout that it was not absolutely certain that Annie was her niece. She had so passionately wished to believe it at the time, that with her naturally anxious mind, she kept fearing this might have influenced her. Still the fact about the initials on the clothes did seem quite conclusive." (Edgar and Ita glanced at each other.) "And then two persons, you know, on oath had borne testimony to Annie's identity. I used to remind her of this, but she would argue with me by the hour, that your likeness to Mrs. Derwent was so striking, your voice, your way of walking, many little peculiarities about you so remarkable, that she could not help being distracted with doubts and misgivings. By Walter's advice I suggested to her to try, as secretly as possible, to procure any possible further evidence on the subject; and if this did not succeed, to let the matter alone, as it would be cruel to raise a question which there would be no means of solving. She did, I believe, make some inquiries."

"I suppose," Ita said, "that she must have been the person who, under the name of Dallas, wrote to the priest at Colla."

"Yes; I now remember that she said so. It was painful to observe how this anxiety took more and more possession of her mind, and poor Annie must

have suffered from it also. Sometimes, as if to make up to her for her misgivings, she used (this she told me herself) to show her all the same passionate affection she had felt, and in some sense did, I think, still feel, for her; but at others, though she reproached herself intensely for it, there came over her a terrible coldness —a feeling that Annie was occupying the place of her own brother's child. I am afraid this was sometimes so strong that Annie was astonished and angered at her manner to her."

"Poor, poor Annie!" Edgar ejaculated, "it was, then, perpetual self-reproach that tormented Mrs. Gerald."

"She knew herself to be in a very precarious state of health, and was uneasy about her will. Her idea was that if the question was never raised about you and Annie, and she remained in possession of Holmwood and the Derwent property, she should of course wish to leave Mr. Derwent her fortune; but, on the other hand, if Annie was ever proved not to be her brother's child, she was of course most anxious to provide for her. She was often contriving expedients to meet this difficulty, but they all seemed open to some objections. She proposed at last what she has actually done, and said that she should leave it to us, to do the best we could under the circumstances. I am come to consult with you both on the subject. Walter would have come, but he is laid up with the gout. Now tell me . . . . what do you think? You see there is nothing to go upon but her own impression. I see myself the likeness she spoke of in the strongest manner . . . . but, of course, there is no proof in that . . . ."

"Dear Mrs. Sydney," Ita said in a low voice, "there are other proofs, though I do not know if they would be conclusive."

She then gave her the various details connected with Mariana's history, and Madame Ranolfi's narrative; and told her of the initials on her own baby clothes.

Margaret listened with eagerness, and when she had heard all, drew a deep breath, and said, "I do not see how there can be a doubt on the point, though, of course, I do not know if it could be legally proved. Oh, Ita," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her neck, "how strange it seems. I wonder what poor Mrs. Gerald would have done if she had known all this?"

"I cannot help thinking she knew part of it. I saw on her table, the day she was taken ill and you brought me back, a letter which I am almost sure was from Madame Ranolfi, and some days before one directed to *Mrs. Dallas*."

"Should we find them, I wonder?"

"We put them in her bureau the day after her death—Annie then took charge of the keys."

"She sent over that bureau and everything that could be moved at a moment's notice, last night to Grantley Manor. We can look for them when I go home. If she did receive some intelligence decisive to her own mind as to that question, I can quite conceive that the shock may have killed her. The reaction of her feelings about Annie, even while it was only a suspicion, was sometimes so strong—the possibility of having ever to disown and, as it were, despoil her, was like an oppressive nightmare to poor Mrs. Gerald. I remember her saying to me one day, 'I could never, under any circumstances, make up my mind to utter the words that would ruin my poor dear child. If it must be known, let it be when I am dead.' Yet all the time there was a yearning tenderness towards you. I think she was more convinced than she even owned

to me that you were her niece. There certainly was never a more extraordinary complication of circumstances, or a more distracting one to a nature like hers. Her feelings about Holmwood were so strong too. I suppose that codicil was a sort of expedient to satisfy her conscience."

"How terribly she must have suffered!" Edgar said. "No wonder she looked so careworn, and sometimes so sad."

"Walter told me to say, Mr. Derwent, that of course what Mrs. Gerald left in trust to him till some change happens, that is, the interest of the twenty thousand pounds, is at your disposal. If the truth is ever positively known and acted upon, then we would make over that sum to Annie with the arrears. This was what he suggested."

"I cannot look forward to dispossessing her; I do not see how we *could* do it," Edgar exclaimed, looking at his wife.

"And why should we?" she eagerly answered, "especially now that we are so well provided for."

"I suppose it is a very difficult question," Margaret said.

"Ita trusts in God to show us a way out of it," he said with an affectionate smile. "Meanwhile, I think I ought to get all the evidence I can. We should satisfy our own minds as much as possible on the subject. I mean to go to London to-morrow and see this Mrs. Ranolfi."

"And I will look over poor Mrs. Gerald's papers. May Ita come to me while you are in London?"

"Yes, most willingly, if only you will both look after poor Annie, and, if possible, get her to see you. She is in a sad state, a dull, hard, hopeless dejection."

"We will drive over every day till we succeed."

Before Mrs. Sydney went away, Ita took her into

the garden, and asked her if Mrs. Gerald had shown any disposition to become a Catholic.

"I cannot exactly say she did," was her reply. "She had a great craving for Confession. She often told me that in her state of mind it would be an unspeakable comfort to disclose her doubts and anxieties to a priest. 'This shows one so much,' she used to say, 'how vain it is to talk of Confession to Anglican clergymen. How could I speak of such a secret and important thing as this to men who hear confessions on their own authority, and whose fitness for it has not been tested and examined as is the case with your priests. Take me, for instance, at this moment—I must either send for a complete stranger, whom no bishop, nobody but himself, has empowered to act as a confessor, or for some clergyman I know. There is not one I am acquainted with in whom I could put such confidence, or who would indeed agree to hear a confession in your sense of the word, except Edgar himself. With you it is so different. How can confession be safe in a Church in which it is not authorized?'"

"But still she did not wish to see a Catholic priest?"

"Sometimes she spoke of it; at one moment I really thought she meant to do so, but she put it off. Human respect, I think, prevented it; the dread of Annie's surprise and the remarks of the servants."

"I hope," Ita said, "and yet . . . . I ought not perhaps to say I hope, she did not wish it when it was too late, for God may have accepted the desire for the act. If I had only asked her that question!"

"Dearest Ita, God is our loving and kind Father. If that thought was in her mind during those speechless hours, it may have been His will that she should expiate, by the inability to express it, her delay in

seeking that grace. There are so many persons now who mean some day or other to be Catholics, who believe that if there is any true Church it is the Catholic Church, and who put off, day by day, taking the decisive step. It makes one so anxious for them. In this case, those hours of consciousness, that pressure of the hand twice repeated which you told me of, fill one with hope. I suppose, dearest, that you guessed the secret of that extraordinary will? If you had had no suspicions, how strange it would have seemed to you. By the way, do you think any idea of the kind has ever crossed Annie's mind?"

"I cannot tell; I should think not; and if so, how hurt she must be."

"How can we prevent her sending us the pictures, and the plate and books? Do you think I might write her a line to say that I hope she will not do so till I have had an opportunity of speaking to her. The worst is, that she must be, I think, very much embittered against us."

"I think you had better not write to her to-day. Edgar will try and see her this afternoon, and he might say something about it from you."

"Yes, beg him to do so. I shall come and fetch you to-morrow. Will it be your parting with this house?"

"Yes," Ita answered, her eyes filling with tears. "I could hardly have believed I could have borne it so quietly; but whatever happens, it is well that Edgar's mind is so taken up with these important thoughts just now. It seems to break the pain of our parting with this place. And our future now, after all, is a bright one. But that dear Annie, what is to become of her?"

CHAPTER XVII.

Some time had elapsed since the conversation related in the last chapter. Edgar Derwent had been to London, had seen Madame Ranolfi, and heard from her lips the same statement she had made to Ita, and which was contained also in a letter found in Mrs. Gerald's bureau. From the date of this letter, it seemed probable that the agitation it must have occasioned to a mind and a frame already much weakened, had led to the seizure which had ended in death. By the sick woman's desire, the priest, who had attended her since she had left the Anglican home, saw Edgar, and assured him that he believed the statement to be true, and Madame Ranolfi perfectly in her right senses. By his advice he obtained from her a formal statement of the facts she had related, which was read and signed before two witnesses. At the same time Mr. Neville wrote to one of his friends at Mentone, who procured an attestation from Antonia, the housekeeper at the Villa Hendon, that the clothes marked with the initials "A. D.," which were in Ita's possession, were the same which Giovanni Piombo had declared on oath to be those which she wore when he had picked her up at sea. This was also confirmed by another old servant who had been in Lady Emily Hendon's service at the time that Ita came to live with her. The Abate Giovanni took down at the same time, in writing, the facts which seemed to have remained impressed with

some degree of accuracy in poor Mariana's memory, and the whole was sent to England.

Edgar then made up his mind to consult, in strict confidence, some lawyer, and after a little hesitation, resolved to lay the subject before his stepfather. He knew him to be not only a very able man and clever lawyer, but also perfectly honest. He did not like him, but this seemed, at this moment, a minor consideration. He had not the least apprehension that he would reveal anything on the subject to Mrs. Langdon. Besides his professional obligation to secresy, he was the last man who would have told a woman a secret, and his wife the last woman to whom he would have confided one. So Edgar went one morning to Lowndes Square, and, to Mrs. Langdon's infinite surprise, was shut up for three hours with her husband.

To his great amazement, Edgar found that Mr. Langdon was far more interested than astonished at the facts he mentioned to him. Some idea had crossed his mind more than once, that the evidence on which Annie's identity had rested was not perfectly satisfactory. When, as she grew up, not the least likeness to any member of the family had been discernible, he had frequently pondered on his original misgivings. With a lawyer's keenness, he had often balanced in his mind the possibility of proving that Edgar was the real heir to the Derwent property. When the marriage between him and his supposed cousin was arranged, there seemed little object in pursuing this idea. When it was broken off, and his engagement to Ita Flower announced, and his wife lamented over his marriage to a girl whose parentage was unknown, and who had been picked up at sea on the coast of Italy, he mentally ejaculated, "What are the odds, I wonder, that *she* is not the real girl?" Neither he nor his wife had seen or heard of Mrs. Robert Derwent's

picture; but it so happened, as he had told Ita the last time he was at Holmwood, that he had known that lady before her marriage, and been struck with her beauty. The first time Miss Flower had been introduced to him after her engagement to Edgar, he observed her likeness to the pretty Maud Ardon he had once so much admired, and then he said to himself, "Now, I should not mind taking odds that she *is* the real girl."

When all the evidence, as it now stood, was placed before him, he rubbed his hands, and said, "Well, my dear sir" (he had never been on a familiar footing with his stepson), "I suppose we may prepare for a *cause célèbre*, that will keep for months, or years, perhaps, all England in suspense. Possession on the one hand, Mrs. Gerald's constant belief in Miss Annie's identity, and the testimony of competent witnesses having supported it at the time; on the other hand, this Italian Madame's declaration. But, then, you know, you might have bribed that person; then the initials on your wife's night-gown, ay, and her likeness to the picture—but people differ so much about likenesses! No; it is not strong in point of law. And then, O Lord bless us! your wife has *turned*, is a Papist, and Miss Annie a staunch Protestant. It would be Protestant *versus* Catholic! There would not be a chance of getting a verdict in our favour!"

"I quite agree with you, and I scarcely like to say, after your decided opinion that we should not succeed, that we have never thought of trying the case."

"*I* never said you should not try it. More evidence might, perhaps, be obtained in Italy. That Caterina may have spoken to others besides Madame Thingabob. Then will Mrs. Sydney bear witness to Mrs. Gerald's doubts? Only she is a Papist again—a plague on it! She would, of course, be in the plot. Mrs. Gerald's

will would go some way, however, in supporting her evidence. No; you must not give it up in a hurry. There is a good deal against your establishing your wife's claim, but it is not hopeless."

"But what I mean is, that neither Ita nor I can bear the idea not only of going to law about it, but even of letting Annie know of this doubt. You must remember how excessively kind she has been to us; and yet you do *not* know all we owe her."

"Oh, if it is an affair of sentiment, do not talk to me," Mr. Langdon replied, taking a pinch of snuff. "I have nothing to say to those sort of considerations. They are out of my line. Please yourselves."

"As to a trial, that is impossible; but it had occurred to me that, if the whole matter was laid before Annie, she might agree to submit the point to arbitration—to the judgment of a certain number of straightforward, unprejudiced men, who would examine the evidence, and . . . ."

"Pooh, pooh! my dear sir; they would not agree. Unpleasantness, that significant word, would have been created, and no result obtained. Better leave things as they are than that."

"Then they must remain as they are; I do not see how it can be helped."

"And if Miss Annie, when she has got over this fit of moping—remember she is only twenty-two or twenty-three, which is it?—takes into her head to marry some low scamp. . . ."

"She would never do that."

"And why should not she? There is nobody to care for, or to look after her. I cannot conceive a more wretched creature than an heiress without a scrap of a relative to see that she is not snapped up by some adventurer . . . ."

"You forget that we are both devotedly attached to her."

"But she won't see you. Now you have given up your living, you will live somewhere else. There she will stay in solitary grandeur till some vulgar attorney, or the old doctor, or a foreign count, perhaps, make their way to Holmwood, and a family of children of that ilk perpetuate the old line of the Derwents."

All this was very disagreeable; but there was some truth in it. Annie, with fifteen hundred a year, would probably be a happier person than with the responsibility of a property of twelve thousand a year. But would she think so herself? Once she might; but now she was changed, estranged, and it was impossible to foresee what the effect might be upon her of such a revelation as the one in question.

Edgar took leave of his stepfather, and parried all his mother's endeavours to discover what they had been talking of. He told her, however, that Mrs. Gerald's fortune had been left in trust in Mr. Sydney's hands.

"And why could not you be trusted with your own money?" she not unnaturally exclaimed.

"There are certain arrangements involved in it," he answered, "that made this desirable. The Sydneys have been as kind as possible."

"I do not see what business they had with it at all. However, if you are satisfied, I have nothing more to say. I am quite contented."

Poor Mrs. Langdon neither felt nor looked the content she expressed, and brooded all day on the stupid way people had of making secrets of things.

It would have been too inconvenient not to go to Grantley Manor, for Edgar to persevere in his intention of declining for himself the invitation to join Ita. It was the only place, within reach of Holmwood,

where they could stay for the present; and his duty with regard to Annie overbalanced other considerations. Week after week they lingered there, becoming every day more attached to the Sydneys, and feeling their hearts more touched by Walter's gentle, thoughtful goodness, and Margaret's overflowing kindness.

Ita was very grateful. Day by day she saw Edgar's prejudices diminishing. Now that he was removed for awhile from the scene of his labours, and from the ceaseless antagonism of Anglican dissensions, a softening influence stole over him. She saw that he read less controversy, that he wrote fewer letters to newspapers, but that he prayed more, and sometimes for hours remained in the chapel on his knees before the altar with his face buried in his hands. He was very unhappy about Annie. She did not refuse to see him or Ita, either alone or together; but these visits seemed only to give her pain. She spoke little, and with effort. She looked wretchedly ill, and became alarmingly thin. He spoke to the servants and found that she ate hardly anything; all energy, all spirits seemed to have left her. She had generally a Bible by her side, but when he tried to talk to her about religion she changed the subject.

Once she said, with a forced smile, "My only complaint against you is, that you took away the religion of my childhood. You destroyed my simple faith in the Bible, which I used to read, foolishly enough, as if it had dropped from the skies, and you did not give any other instead."

Edgar felt deeply pained. "Dearest Annie," he said, "I tried to make you believe, as I did myself, in the Catholic religion taught by our Church."

She raised her dull, melancholy eyes, and said, "Your Church had taught me Protestantism. But I

did not mean to speak of that. I am too weak and tired to argue."

Some days elapsed, and one afternoon Edgar met the physician, who had attended the family at Holmwood for a great number of years. The old man said to him—

"Have you seen your cousin lately, Mr. Derwent? I was with her yesterday. I cannot help feeling very anxious about her. She will die if she does not make some change in her mode of life."

Edgar shuddered. It was a morbid fancy, but it seemed almost as if they were killing Annie; but what could they do?

The physician went on—"She neither sleeps nor eats; she never goes out; she does not come to church, though she could do so if she tried; she is not so weak as utterly prostrated. But it will end in atrophy; unless she has very soon change of air and scene, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"Have you told her so?"

"Repeatedly; but she always refuses, and when I try to alarm her she only smiles."

"I have also done my utmost," Edgar said, "but she will not even listen to me. She shuts my mouth directly, and seems hurt and annoyed if I persist."

"Who has influence with her?"

"Nobody," Edgar answered, with a sigh.

"She really is killing herself," the doctor rejoined.

Edgar did not say it aloud, but he thought, "That is, perhaps, what she intends."

As he entered the grounds at Grantley Manor, he saw his wife and the Sydneys sitting on a bench on the terrace. They were looking the picture of happiness. Margaret's last baby was on her knees, and Ita shaking before it a bunch of roses, the falling leaves of which the fat little hands were trying to

catch. At each failure there were shouts of delight. Ita was blushing and laughing. Mrs. Sydney had just whispered to her, "By this time next year, a Master or Miss Derwent will, I hope, be catching rose-leaves here."

Edgar stopped, and mused on that picture, and on the one the old doctor had drawn of that Annie whom he had played with as a child, whom he had always loved, whom he had been affianced to once, and who had always ever been to him the most faithful, devoted, and generous of friends. There was his blooming, lovely wife, whom Annie had given to him—to him her own betrothed. The hope of a great and holy joy was beaming in her face, and filling her heart with grateful happiness, his own with tender emotion. Once he would have told that news to Annie, and felt sure of her sympathy. Now, in presence of her great, stern grief, he had not felt courage to do so.

There they were happy—yes, for the cloud overshadowing their lives seemed to be gradually dwindling away in the light that was slowly dawning upon him. There they were, loving and loved, with kind friends and pleasant hopes; and there she was friendless and alone, a blight on her young life, a dark shadow on her heart; ill, weak, perhaps dying, and with no settled faith, no heavenly hopes. The contrast at that moment struck him so terribly, that, as he advanced towards them, both Mrs. Sydney and Ita were frightened at the expression of his countenance.

"Has anything happened?" Ita exclaimed.

"No," he said; "nothing. But I have met Dr. Lawrenson. He gives a sad account of Annie." He repeated what the physician had said, and there was a sad silence when he had done speaking. He seemed so deeply affected, that nobody was inclined to utter.

At last, old Walter, as his wife called him, with

somewhat more justice then than in former days, said, "It strikes me that you are all making a very great mistake." They all looked towards him surprised. "Yes, it appears to me that you are letting this poor girl die, when you might save her life."

"What do you mean?" they all exclaimed.

"Why, I mean that you are afraid, because she is sad and weak, to tell her what might give her new life."

There was another silence; they anxiously listened for his next words, and Margaret's eyes sparkled with an expression that seemed to say, "Well done, old Walter!"

"If you look back to her past life you must own that her ruling passion has been . . . ."

"Her love of Holmwood!" Edgar said with a deep sigh.

"Not a bit of it. The desire to make Holmwood a blessing and a home for you. It is of no use not to speak out. Truth is always the best policy, in matters of feeling as well as of interest. Your marriage prevented Holmwood House from being your home. She created another for you, and circumstances have made you abandon it. It is quite as likely as not that, if she was to hear of the doubts that exist as to her own birth, and the likelihood that your wife is really the person she is supposed to be, it would be a relief to her."

"But then it might be just the contrary," Edgar said.

"There is another view of the subject," Mr. Sydney observed, "which I think you have all too much overlooked!"

"What is that?" Ita asked.

"Why, if you, Mrs. Derwent, are the daughter of the Robert Derwents, Annie must be the daughter of the poor woman at Mentone. Are you justified, when

there is such strong apparent evidence, that such is the case—to keep the child from her mother, the mother from her child?"

"Would it not be terrible for Annie?" Margaret asked. "Would it not be a painful struggle to have to own a mother in that rank of life?"

"What sort of person is she?" Walter Sydney asked, turning to Ita.

"She is very gentle, and pious, and refined, in her simple way, as Italians often are. If I thought she was my mother, I should not be at all reluctant to own her. What she has gone through has somewhat affected her memory, but not her understanding."

"I do not think I could ever have courage to let Annie know how the case stands," Edgar said.

"We must talk about it again later," Margaret replied. "I must now take baby home."

The next day, when Mrs. Sydney came down to breakfast, she found a letter on the table, which seemed, when she had opened it, to make her very thoughtful. After reading it two or three times over, she gave it to her husband with a significant look, and was, contrary to her custom, grave, and absent as long as she remained in the breakfast-room. When she left it, Walter followed her into her own little den, as she called it. She immediately said to him, "Why do you think she wants to see me?"

"It is impossible to guess," he answered. "It may be that Mrs. Gerald's will preys on her mind, and gives her some suspicion. You had better go at once, Maggy, and if she gives you an opportunity, and, indeed, I should say, in any case, tell her the whole truth."

"You think so?"

"Yes; I think it would, at the same time, be well to make it appear, which indeed is the case, that there would not be, in all probability, sufficient evidence to

invalidate her position in the eyes of the law. But I am sure it is fair and right to place the facts, just as we know them, before her. Indeed, I think it may be the means of saving her life."

"But if, on the contrary, I should do her harm?"

"Well, my dear love, you can only do the best you can. Her physician says she will die if something does not rouse her and change her present state of mind and mode of life. It is not from any selfish motives you will take this step; not even in the worldly interest of your friends; for if poor Annie was roused to some violent feeling of opposition by this disclosure, it might do what is wished, and benefit her health. It would be as well, however, if you were to stop on the way at Doctor Lawrenson's house. He is almost always at home till eleven. You would just catch him. Tell him that what he said to Edgar yesterday about Miss Derwent has made us all anxious. Ask his opinion as to the effect which an exciting and perhaps a painful subject of thought might have upon her, and act accordingly."

"Pray for me, that if I do speak, I may say just what I ought, and in the best way."

"Shall I order the pony-chaise for you?"

"Yes, and I suppose I had better not let the Derwents know anything about her note, and my intention of speaking to her?"

"Certainly not; it is kinder to them to take the responsibility on ourselves."

"I wish you could go instead of me."

"Not now that she has asked to see you; and then you forget my gouty foot. God bless you, little woman."

Mrs. Sydney drove up to the door of Doctor Lawrenson's house just as he was getting into his gig. They both went back into his parlour, and after talk-

ing some time about Annie's state of health, she put to him, confidentially, the question she wished answered.

He mused a little, and then said, "My dear Madam, to rouse her interest in anything, whether painful or not, is an object at this moment. I have no hesitation in saying that, if the present state of things lasts much longer, she will not live. It has struck me that the poor young lady must have something on her mind, beyond her grief for her good aunt's death. She ought to have change of some sort, and as she is too old to be carried out of the house against her will, a shock of any kind seems the only chance of rousing her. If she should seem too much agitated by anything you may have to communicate, send for me, I shall be at home again in the course of the afternoon."

This opinion settled Mrs. Sydney's remaining doubts, and she made up her mind that speak she must; but sometimes a thing seems tolerably easy at a distance, which, when the moment draws near, becomes difficult, if not impossible. During the hour that it took to drive from the doctor's house to Holmwood, poor Mrs. Sydney felt every instant more intensely the difficulty of the task she had undertaken. If Annie did not lead to the subject, she began to doubt the possibility of broaching it. If she had felt this before she saw her, she was far more strongly impressed with it on entering the drawing-room, where poor Annie was sitting alone in an arm-chair, looking so pale, thin, and wan, and her eyes so unnaturally large, that she looked like the shadow of her former self. A short, nervous cough shook her feeble frame, and it required a strong effort on Margaret Sydney's part to suppress her emotion. Annie's greeting was, however, so cold and formal, that it enabled her to regain composure. They spoke of indifferent things, and then Mrs. Sydney said, "You

are not looking well; you really ought to take care of yourself, or to let us all take care of you. If I could only persuade you to come to us!"

"Thank you very much. I do not feel well enough to pay visits."

"But we have only got Edgar and Ita with us."

"Yes, I know they are staying with you."

"Will you not think of it?"

"No, thank you, I like better being at home."

The word struck on Mrs. Sydney's heart. "Could she bring herself to hint that Holmwood was perhaps not her home?"

"But you may become seriously ill, your doctor says so, if you have not change of air and scene."

"Much he knows about it. Besides . . . ." she paused, and a sudden emotion passed over the pale stern face.

"Besides what?" Margaret exclaimed, seizing Annie's cold hand, which was not withdrawn though it did not return the pressure of her own.

No answer came.

"I can understand that it would be an effort to leave Holmwood . . . . It is looking so beautiful just now . . . ." she added, getting nervous, and hardly knowing what to say.

"Does it?" Annie listlessly asked.

"Do you really never go out?"

"No, I hate the sight of everything here. I cannot bear to look at the churchyard where *she* is buried or at the house *they* have left. It is all hateful to me."

"Then why, oh, why will you not, why will you not leave it for awhile?"

"Because I want to go away for ever."

Margaret inwardly started. What did those words mean?

But Annie added in a low, hoarse voice, "Because, I want to die."

Shocked and grieved, Mrs. Sydney said, "Oh dear, dear child, do not say that, it is wrong to throw away health, to seek death in that way. Why do you wish to die?"

"Because I have nothing to live for. I can make nobody happy, and I am in the way of other people's happiness. I know I must not kill myself; people of all religions agree in that, I believe; but I do not see why I should try to live."

"We have all something to live for," Mrs. Sydney gently said, still holding her hand.

"That is what people say, I do not see it myself; but you must wonder why I asked you to come."

Again Margaret's heart began to beat fast.

"The fact is that you are the only person, I think, who can tell me why my aunt, who loved me so much . . . ." here Annie's voice trembled, "took a dislike to me at last . . . ."

"I am sure she did not," Mrs. Sydney earnestly said.

"She did, she was quite altered. Sometimes at least. She did nothing but stare at Ita the last days of her life, and why did she leave you those things which you do not want a bit? If she would only have let me think she loved me as she used to do. I was so accustomed to it . . . ."

"You miss her affection, her unbounded devotion to you . . . . you feel very lonely, don't you?"

There was an effort on Annie's part to suppress her tears, but it would not do, poor child! She lifted up her voice and wept long and bitterly. She had disliked Mrs. Sydney for no other reason than because she was a Catholic; otherwise she would have felt well disposed towards her. She knew that the fortune bequeathed to

Mr. Sydney had been made over to Edgar. She was more puzzled than displeased at the strange provisions of her aunt's will, in which it was evident the Sydneys were not personally interested. Her tears flowed unrestrainedly for some time, and Mrs. Sydney ventured to kiss her brow.

"How hot your head is," she said.

"Do you think I shall die . . . . ?"

"No, I do not; you are young, you ought to live."

"I wish I was dead."

"You must not say that."

"Why not? There is nobody who would be sorry if I was to die, and they are the worse for my living . . . ."

"Are you speaking of Edgar and Ita?"

"Yes; it would be a blessing for them if I was dead. Oh, if you knew how I hate this place I once was so fond of. The sound of the river worries me at night so that I cannot sleep. The cawing of the rooks distract me, and when the agent comes to speak to me about business, I loathe the sight of him. I never was like other girls. I never cared for many people. I was happy those two years that they lived in the Vicarage, and that I worked in their garden. That was the sort of life that suited me. I felt my aunt loved me, and I was making Edgar happy and comfortable. Oh, I wish I could die."

Margaret had been inwardly praying for the last few minutes, and then she said very quietly, "I could tell you something that would astonish you very much. That would explain what has puzzled you, but I hardly know if I can venture to do so."

Annie turned her large wondering eyes upon her.

"It may startle you very much—pain you, perhaps; and yet . . . ."

"What can it be?"

"Mrs. Gerald had some doubts, especially quite at last, whether . . . ." Mrs. Sydney felt her voice failing her, a nervous sensation in her throat, as if she could hardly get out the words—"whether you were, after all, her niece, her brother Robert's daughter." She raised her eyes apprehensively to Annie's face. Her countenance had not changed, though she looked surprised.

"And who did she suppose I was, then?"

"Do you wish me to tell you all I know on the subject?"

"Yes, very much."

"She had made sure you were Annie Derwent, because you were saved out of the ship on board of which her brother and his wife perished, and you wore a night-gown marked with the initials 'A. D.,' which she recognized as being one of those of her infant niece. Two persons, also, who came from Florence to Genoa, swore that you were Mr. Derwent's child."

"Well, and what made her doubt it, then?" As she asked this, two deep crimson spots rose in Annie's pale cheeks. She was beginning to understand what the question involved.

"It is a long story," Mrs. Sydney said, for she was anxious not to mention at once Ita's name. "Mrs. Gerald was struck with an extraordinary likeness between her sister-in-law and a person . . . ."

A sudden emotion shook Annie from head to foot. She seized violently hold of Mrs. Sydney's arm, and gasped out, "Between the picture in her room and Ita?"

Mrs. Sydney did not reply.

"Have I not seen that myself?" Annie continued, rather wildly; "have I not been struck with it over and over again? and thought what an extraordinary likeness there was between her fate and mine—

that we should have both been saved from drowning in such a strange way, and that she should be so like what my mother must have been. But are there any other proofs . . . ."

Mrs. Sydney then went on, as calmly and as clearly as she could, under the circumstances, relating the various facts which formed a chain of evidence conclusive enough to an impartial mind. When Mariana was mentioned, Annie again coloured violently, and drew a deep breath. She had trouble to attend to the details of the narrative. She was evidently musing, in a scarcely collected manner, on the results of this astounding communication, and became very excited.

"I should be so glad," she said, "I should be so glad. I wonder if it is quite sure."

Mrs. Sydney hesitated a little about speaking of the mark on the shoulder which Mariana had mentioned. On the whole, she thought it would be better to leave nothing unsaid.

"There is one circumstance, dear Annie, which might, perhaps, still further corroborate this evidence. Mariana told Ita that her child had fallen on something sharp when she was a little baby, and that the mark of that accident would have been likely to remain."

"Was it on the shoulder?"

"Yes, on the right shoulder."

"Then there is no doubt at all about it. I have a mark of that kind, not very distinct now, but it used to be so. They said I must have been hurt in the ship. I remember its being talked about when I was little. Look if you can see it."

Mrs. Sydney did as she wished, and found the faint trace of something like a mark on Annie's shoulder.

"There can be no doubt now, I suppose," Annie again repeated, her cheeks very much flushed, and in

a nervous voice. "Will you send for Ita. I want to see her. I want to look at the picture again. Then Holmwood would be theirs at once?"

"No, no; not at once. There would be much to be considered. It is something to think of quietly."

"Yes, yes—to think of a great deal. Did you say that that poor Mariana is at Mentone? I wonder when I can see her. Do not go away, Mrs. Sydney. I cannot be left alone now. Will you send for Edgar and Ita? I want to speak to them. And will you come up with me and look at the picture? I understand now my poor aunt's will. But she is not my aunt, if this is true. It seems very like a dream. I do not want to awake. It is as if I had been dead for some weeks, and was beginning to be alive again. Will you write a note, and tell them to come?"

Margaret thought it wisest to comply with the request, and felt a natural desire to be helped in the difficult task of calming Annie's mind, which from the deepest apathy had suddenly passed to a feverish excitement, the effects of which, in her weak state, were to be dreaded.

She insisted on reading over and over again Madame Ranolfi's letter, and that of the priest at Colla, which Mrs. Sydney had brought with her. But what had taken most hold of her mind was the thought of Mariana. Margaret could not make out whether she feared most or rejoiced in the idea of finding in her a mother. It may be easily imagined with what feelings Edgar and Ita read Mrs. Sydney's short note.

"DEAREST ITA,—I have told her all. She is very much excited—a little agitated but does not seem at all unhappy; only too anxious to act in some way or other at once. She wishes you both to come immediately to her. All the apathy is gone. I am only

afraid of a reaction. Order the carriage, and come at once. I will go home when you arrive."

When Edgar and his wife reached Holmwood, Mrs. Sydney met them at the door. "I have sent for the doctor," she said. "I am a little anxious about Annie, I think she is at moments light-headed. She has insisted on *the* picture being brought to her room, and has been asking, every minute, if Ita has come."

"Let us go to her," Edgar said. "Oh, my God! I would give up Holmwood a thousand times over, and for ever, if I could see Annie well."

They did not see her well for many a long day, and, for a moment, it seemed little likely that she would recover. The sudden excitement produced a fever which affected her head, and poor Mrs. Sydney suffered intensely from the fear that she had endangered her life by informing her of the facts which were so greatly to influence her fate. But her old Walter always said that she had acted for the best, and that she should not grieve too much, whatever the consequences might prove. At last there came a favourable turn in the illness. During the whole course of it, Annie had not suffered Mrs. Derwent's picture to be out of her sight. She had ordered it to be placed so that she could see it from her bed. Her eyes were constantly turning towards it, or looking at Ita, whom she often asked for. When light-headed, she also kept saying that she wanted her mother. The maids thought it was the presence of the portrait that put this into her head. "Poor young lady!" one of them said to Ita, "now that her aunt is dead, she thinks her mother must be alive. Well, she is left very lonesome, to be sure!"

One evening, Edgar and Ita were sitting in the next room, while the servants had gone down to supper,

and they heard her saying, in a low voice, "Edgar, I want to go to my mother."

Ita put her finger on her lips, and the tears came into her eyes. Edgar went gently up to the bedside and said, "Dearest Annie, you must get well first, and then we will do all you wish."

She stared at him, and then began, to his great surprise, to hum a little song, which her Italian nurse had taught them both when they were children, but which they had not thought of for years—

"Se Moneca te fai,
To frate me farò,
Ma che tu lo farai
Nol credo, no Oibò!"

The words sounded strangely on the lips of the sick girl; but it showed that her mind was unconsciously running on Italy. Then she wandered off to something else, and soon afterwards fell asleep.

Edgar came back to his wife, and said, "Mr. Sydney has opened a letter this morning directed to Mrs. Gerald. As her executor, he had a right to do so, and it contains additional evidence that dear Annie is not her niece. It is from Caterina, and was written, or dictated, on her death-bed. Is it not strange that poor Annie should have hummed that song just now? The account Caterina gives, tallies exactly with the one Madame Ranolfi said she had heard from her. Whoever forwarded the parcel to England, contented himself with true Italian nonchalance, with directing it to La Signora Gerald, Posta Restante, Londra. There it has remained for years. But, the other day, a friend of my stepfather's, while searching for a missing letter at the General Post-Office, saw this one, and sent it here. It contains the same particulars, given almost in the same words. I do not see how

there can be any further doubt on the subject. I wonder if Caterina ever gave any hint of it to the servants here."

"I was going to tell you," Ita answered, "that Mrs. Marsden was speaking to me this morning of Annie's illness, and gave it as her opinion—you know her sententious manner—that the poor young lady had something on her mind, and she should not wonder if she had, for strange things had been sometimes mentioned by certain people. I continued to arrange the flowers as if I had not heard, and she went on to say that Caterina, Annie's Italian nurse, had let fall some curious hints about the hurry Mrs. Gerald had been in to acknowledge her as her niece, and that there were some might have had a better right to stand in Miss Annie's shoes than herself. She had not taken notice of these speeches, for she never talked to anybody, but it had been always a stumbling-block to her—that is one of her favourite words—that their young lady should not be like any of the family. It was so contrary that she should have grey eyes and a square-like face, for the Derwents had always had blue eyes and round delicate faces. She also said that when Caterina was sent away, she flew out against the English in the steward's room, upon which she herself thought it right to tell her that she should consider it a fortunate day when there was no Italian in the house. 'For the matter of that,' says she, 'there may be one more Italian in the house than you think for,' and there she stopped."

"Caterina or Mrs. Marsden?"

"Caterina; but at that moment Annie sent for me, and my talk with Mrs. Marsden came also to an end.'

Ita paused, and said, "Now I will tell you one thing more. I hope you will not mind my having done it, I was sorry for it afterwards; it was the im-

pulse of the moment. I was looking again yesterday —I am ashamed to say how often I do so—at the things and the shawl. When Mrs. Marsden came in to tell me the doctor was with Annie, I could not resist spreading out the shawl, so that she should take notice of it. She looked at it, and said, 'I have never seen you wear this shawl, ma'am. To be sure it is very faded and old, but a fine real Cashmere. I declare now, I remember that poor Mrs. Robert Derwent had just such a one in her trousseau.' Then I felt how foolish I had been, for I knew I looked as red and conscious as possible, and she must have seen it, and I suppose that is why this morning she began to speak about Caterina's hints."

Edgar looked grave. "It was almost a pity, I think, you let her see the shawl; and yet it will, it must, soon be necessary to compare and to weigh all the evidence on the subject. Still one had rather it should not be talked about till Annie is well, and herself takes the lead in the matter. I wonder how far there have been any reports or surmises."

"Now that I look back I remember often feeling surprised that the servants here, the two or three old ones I mean, who have been in the family for twenty and thirty years, did not appear more fond of Annie. I attributed it to the *brusquerie* of her manner, for she is always good and kind to every one. But if any doubt was in their mind, it would account for it in another way."

"They may have had misgivings about her being my uncle's daughter, and yet never dreamed of anything concerning you."

"Yes; unless they had put together my likeness to the picture, and my being found at sea."

"Is that generally known, do you think? You never spoke of it to any one here, did you?"

"No, but your mother knows it, and so may her servants, and it may have reached them in other ways also."

"No doubt reports of that kind spread very quickly. Well, all we can do for the present, I think, is to remain quite passive, and when Annie gets better we shall see what her wishes are, and act accordingly."

During the next few days Annie often made efforts to concentrate her ideas, and attempted to converse with Edgar and Ita, or Mrs. Sydney, but by the doctor's advice they discouraged these efforts; when she persisted in them her mind very soon grew confused, and wandered again. However, one morning, after a long and refreshing night's sleep, she awoke much better, and quite composed. That day, when Ita came to her bedside, she looked at her with some emotion, evidently wishing to allude to their mutual positions, but not knowing at all how to begin. At last she said, with a smile, "How shall we manage about our names?"

Ita only answered by kissing her.

"It is very odd it never occurred to me."

"How could it have done so, dearest Annie?"

"Oh, because I always thought you were like the picture; and then I had heard about your being found in that way at sea. I might have put it all together. I am so sorry I was taken for you . . . . but it is all right now for all of us. But I am glad Mr. Pratt never knew of it. He is the only person who would have cared."

Ita burst into tears. These last words had affected her beyond what Annie herself felt or understood, for she looked surprised, and said, "I do not care, I am not sorry, you must not think I am sorry; on the contrary," then pausing a little she whispered, "I want you to tell me about my mother."

Ita hesitated a little.

"I mean Mariana, is not that her name?"

"Yes, Mariana Adorno."

"And what was I called?"

"Lucia."

Annie was again silent for a little while, then she said, "Tell me about her."

Ita spoke of the fair and gentle face she had seen and admired before she knew who Mariana was, and described how they had first met, and with delicate tenderness and tact touched on the poor infirm mother's yearning for her child, and her disappointment when she had to part with the little nightgown she had shown her. "That was your nightgown," Annie said; "where is mine, I wonder?"

"Mrs. Sydney found it wrapt up and sealed in a parcel in Mrs. Gerald's bureau. She had written on it what it was."

"You must call *her* your aunt," Annie said, with a husky voice.

"*Our* aunt, dearest Annie. Oh, we must be, we are, sisters. There must be always such a strong tie between us who have been . . . ." she hesitated a moment, and Annie finished the sentence,

"In each other's places so long."

"I did not mean that," Ita exclaimed.

"No, I did not think you did."

"What I was going to say was, that we have both loved so much the same . . . ."

"I know, I know, but we will not talk of that now . . . ."

There are persons to whom the expression of some kind of feelings is almost impossible, and Annie's towards Ita were of that sort, strange and conflicting. She could not have put them into words. Ita, on the other hand, was longing to pour forth the affection and

sympathy with which her heart was overflowing, but the fear of wounding Annie's reserve restrained her from uttering all she felt.

Later in the day Annie sent for Edgar. She was not reserved with him, there was nothing now she wished to keep from him. The old intimacy of their earlier years seemed to return in that moment, and the look of her face when he came into the room was beautiful.

"I am so much better," she said; "I can now speak of all I have been thinking of, but which I was too weak to talk about till to-day."

"And you must not tire yourself now, my own dear Annie. I will go away if you do."

"No, it will not tire me to speak. I want to tell you that I am happier than I have been for a long time, that there is a great weight off my heart. You must take possession of Holmwood at once. You know it belongs to you and Ita. And I know you will give me a little cottage to live in, and I can work again in your garden."

"Dearest Annie, we shall settle everything later. If you wish it, compromise about the property, as people call it, you will still be rich . . . ."

"No, no. I hate the trouble of it. If you knew how miserable I have been."

"Well, but you can be rich still, and have, if you like, no trouble about it."

"No, poor, and have no trouble about it. I have always thought I should be happy if I was a poor person and earned my bread."

"I am afraid we cannot let you do that," he said, smiling.

"I should like to make my mother comfortable. It seems so odd to be speaking of her. Ita says she loves me." Then after a pause, "Somebody said, oh it was

before I was ill, that Holmwood is looking so beautiful. I am very glad, because now it is yours. You know I always wished that."

"But, my own dear Annie, we must wait. Nothing can be settled yet. When you are quite well we will lay it all before impartial persons, and they will advise us what to do."

"No, I will not have it submitted to anybody. You will make me unhappy if you do that. I had rather have it all settled between ourselves, and you will give me enough to live upon."

"In the first place, dearest Annie, if you were not to keep this place and your present fortune, you would have £800 a year, which in that case Mrs. Gerald left you."

"I thought she had left it to the Sydneys."

"Only in trust for me or for you, as it might happen."

"God bless her!" Annie said, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"But besides that, Annie, of course, you must have an ample income."

"Oh no, nothing more. Do not tease me, Edgar. Only I should like to make my mother comfortable as soon as I could."

"Ita has done it in some measure already, and we will arrange whatever you wish."

"That was very good of Ita. Edgar, I want to say something to you. I wish so much you had a child."

"I hope I may have one soon, dear Annie."

"Oh, is it so? That is good news." She remained silent a moment, and then said, "My mother is a Catholic, I suppose?"

"Now really, dear Annie, you must not talk any more."

Annie nodded assent, folded her arms on her breast and closed her eyes.

Edgar, who was lingering by her side, heard her murmur to herself.

"I am very happy. It almost seems as if I was beginning a new life."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Once more Ita was descending the winding road from La Turbia to Mentone, not with the exulting delight of the preceding year, but with a heart mellowed by suffering, strengthened by the light of a definite faith, full of a deeper courage and an intense gratitude, that the sorrows and fears which had threatened to darken her life had, in a great measure, passed away. Her conscience was at rest, and Edgar not estranged from her. She remembered the terrible words he had spoken, when the first idea of her intended change of religion had presented itself to his mind, and she blessed God, in the fervour of her soul, that her own courage had not failed, and that he had been patient and kind in their hour of trial.

Another great change had occurred in her existence —the mystery of her birth had been solved since she had last gazed on that glorious view; she was no longer the unknown foundling of that blue silvery sea; she was Edgar's cousin as well as his wife; she was the acknowledged mistress of Holmwood House and its broad lands. The evidence, collected with care and strengthened by additional proofs, which, when the subject had been looked into, had been produced from several quarters, had been submitted to a chosen number of friends of the family

and men of legal eminence, who had unanimously agreed that they were perfectly satisfied as to her identity. Persons who had known Mrs. Robert Derwent at her age bore witness, as well as her picture, to the likeness between them. The most eager advocate of Ita's claims was the actual possessor of the Derwent estates. On the day that she was to be confronted with the portrait of her mother, in presence of the arbiters of this singular question, Annie, who was still too weak to leave her room, had sent for her. She found her sitting on the sofa, with a blue scarf on her knees.

"Come here," she said, "I want to dress you up in a turban, as I did once before."

Ita knelt down by her side, for she saw it would vex her to refuse; but she could hardly help letting tears fall on the thin hands that were arranging her dress.

"Dearest Annie!" she murmured, "that you should be doing this to-day!"

A little tired, Annie leant back, and asked, "Am I at all like my mother?"

Ita was thinking at that very moment that the likeness, which had not been apparent when Annie was a healthy, rosy girl, had become striking since her illness. She kissed her hand fondly, and said, "Yes, you are a little like her."

"I am thinking of King Solomon."

Ita could not help smiling. "And what of him?"

"Nothing very wise; only it occurred to me that those good people, who have come together to decide on what nobody has a doubt about, are going to say, not like Solomon, which of us two is to have a live child, but which is to have a living mother. My share will be the best, you will have the picture, and I, a real mother . . . . Ita, I do so want to see her. I want to go to her! Will you tell Edgar so?"

And soon, very soon, as the cold weather set in, it

was thought well, on every account, that Annie should be taken to a southern climate. Though better in some ways, she was very weak, and her cough did not leave her. She had recovered her spirits, but was restless and excitable. It was her express wish that Mariana should not hear of her existence till they could meet. One day she said to Ita, in a half-amused, half-melancholy manner, "I must get accustomed to my own name before I see her. She will call me Lucia! How strange that *my* name should be Lucia Adorno!"

"Edgar was saying yesterday that he hoped you would never call yourself by any other name than Annie. He could never call you anything else."

"Did he say so?" Annie asked, with one of her broad, pleased smiles. "And does he mean to go on calling you Ita."

"Of course he does. It would puzzle him to death if we were to exchange names."

Annie laughed merrily, then suddenly becoming grave, she said, "What terrible things might have happened! Suppose he had married me, and all this had been found out afterwards!"

It was settled that as soon as Annie was strong enough to travel, they should all go to Mentone, and the Villa Hendon was ordered to be got ready for them. Edgar fancied that it might be painful to Annie to meet her mother at a place where she was known as a poor woman, and he proposed that they should take a house at Hyères, or at Cannes, and send for Mariana. But both Mrs. Sydney and Ita felt convinced she had no feeling of this kind, and that her mind had, moreover, fixed itself with a yearning desire on the idea of Mentone. She often said she did not care for France; she wished to live in Italy, and amused herself with learning from Ita some words in the Mentonese dialect.

At last they set out in the midst of what the French call the *petit été de St. Martin*, a lovely season of the year in the South. And as they advanced on their way, a real summer seemed to greet them. Lying in an invalid carriage, Annie saw all those new scenes rapidly passing before her eyes; the deepening azure of the Provençal sky, the lovely banks of the Rhone, the almost tropical vegetation of the shores of the Mediterranean. With a singular apathy she looked on all these things, and no expressions of surprise or of admiration rose to her lips. Ita was surprised and a little disappointed that the day they left Nice in a *voiturier* carriage she scarcely spoke at all. When they passed the promontory of Monaco, she asked if it was Mentone, and when Mentone became visible, and Ita pointed it out, her countenance showed some emotion; but she said nothing. When the carriage stopped at the gate of the villa she was too weak to walk across the garden to the house. Edgar and his servant carried her into the drawing-room, and placed her on a couch.

Annie closed her eyes a moment, and Ita bathed her forehead with eau de Cologne. In a minute or two she said,

"Now go and fetch my mother."

"Not this evening, do you think, dearest Annie? Had you not better wait till to-morrow?"

"I have waited so long," she answered. "I *want* my mother."

Edgar and Ita looked at each other.

"We had better do what she wishes," he whispered to his wife.

"And what shall I tell her? . . . ." Ita said, gently bending over Annie.

"Nothing; only bring her here," she answered.

"Shall I stay with you?" Edgar asked.

"No, dear Edgar, I had rather be alone. I feel quite well."

He went into the town with Ita. "This is an anxious moment," he said; "but on the whole, the meeting had better, perhaps, not be delayed."

As they entered the Via Lunga, Ita said, "This is where she lives," and stopped at a door near the gateway. "Will you wait here while I go in?"

Mariana was sitting at her spinning-wheel near the window. She looked up when the door opened.

"Jesu mio!" she exclaimed. "The Signorina Inglese!" And gentle words of endearment greeted Ita. "So you are come back to Mentone, dear lady. It is well, very well. Oh, what a joy to see your face again!"

"I am so glad to see you," Ita said, kissing her affectionately. "I have thought of you so often, and there is somebody with us at the Villa Hendon who has heard of you, and wishes so much to know you."

Mariana smiled.

"Tell me," asked Ita, "can you walk a little way without too much trouble!"

"With those two friends," Mariana answered, pointing to her crutches.

"Could you come as far as the Villa Hendon?"

"Yes, I could. I go sometimes to the chapel of Sant' Anna in the olive grove. But that reminds me, Signorina, is it true? oh, is it true what Pré Gian tells me, that you are now a *buona Christiana*—a real Catholic?"

"Yes, Mariana mia, indeed I am. God has been very good to me."

Mariana lifted up her eyes to heaven with a mute but rapturous expression of joy. When Ita saw her face literally beaming with gratitude for her own return to the fold, she thought anxiously of the pain

which would mingle with her happiness when she should find that Annie was a Protestant.

"Will you come with me, then?" she said, and Mariana rose and followed her, leaning on her crutches. They found Edgar standing near the door. This was the first sight he had of Annie's mother. He was immediately struck with her countenance; with its calm, peaceful expression. The refinement of a devout Italian of the lower orders, is different from any other kind of refinement, except perhaps what is sometimes seen in the Irish poor. There is a grace and sweetness about it quite distinct from what education or natural amiability produces; something of poetry mixes with it, and yet it is perfectly simple. It helps us to picture to ourselves the fishermen of Galilee, and even the holy home of Nazareth.

Mariana saluted Edgar with a kind smile, and then turning to Ita, she said, "I was speaking just now, Signora, of what our Lord has done for you, and I speak to Him every day of what you do for me."

"Oh, it has been so very, very little, but the lady you are going to see will make you much happier than I can."

"Will she? I am quite happy as I am. I suppose she cannot tell me anything about my child?" As she said these words there was a wistful look at Ita, who turned away to avoid answering. "I thought that when Pré Gian took down in writing all I could remember about the loss of my Lucia, and the English lady and gentleman on board the ship, and sent the paper to England, I might perhaps hear something about her. But nothing came of it, Pazienza! God's will be done."

Ita consulted her husband by a hurried glance, but he shook his head, implying that they must leave it to Annie to bring about the disclosure in her own way.

The sound of the crutches on the hall floor gave warning to poor Annie that her mother had entered the house. Edgar opened the door of the drawing-room, and said: "She is here, Annie."

"Let her come in," she answered, very calmly, and the mother saw her child again after twenty-three years' absence, and knew her not.

"You are ill, Signora?" she said, as she stood near the couch, looking compassionately on the pale, thin, young face of the stranger.

"Sit down here," Annie murmured, in Italian, pointing to a chair close to her. She held out her hand to Mariana, who took it, and said:

"But you have the fever, Signorina. What a poor little burning hand this is?"

Annie said in a low voice, "Do you guess anything?"

Suddenly a violent trembling shook Mariana's frame; she fell on her knees, leaning against the arm of the sofa.

"Oh, do not kneel," Annie whispered.

"Let me look! Pray, for the love of God, let me look at your shoulder. They said the mark would always remain." As Mariana gasped out these words, Annie opened her dress and uncovered her shoulder.

"It is there," she said; "though perhaps you can hardly see it."

A faint cry burst from the poor mother, and she pressed her lips upon it with silent ecstasy. "There it is!" she cried; "there it is! O Lucia, mia! O Dio, mio!"

Annie did not speak, but she kept a tight hold of her mother's hand. There was a wonderful power of loving, deep deep down in her heart, but words did not come easily to her help. It did not signify—dreamlike as they were—there was a strange sweetness

in the first moments of that meeting. Mariana asked for no explanations—for no further proofs—she never for an instant doubted that Annie was her Lucia, and could not remove her eyes from the pale face of her child. With a sort of reverence she kissed over and over again the hand of her new-found treasure.

"Kiss my lips and my forehead," Annie said in bad Italian, and as Mariana bent over her, she drew her into her arms, laid her head against her breast, and felt like a little child again.

When Edgar and Ita came into the room, Annie looked up with a bright smile. Without letting go Mariana's hand, she drew Ita close to her and whispered, "I have shown her the mark. She knew it again at once."

From that day a singular life began for that mother and that daughter. They could not bear to be apart; they did not say much to each other, but for hours sat working side by side; and when Annie had rested from the journey, they spent most of their time on the terrace, under the catalpa trees. But one sad discovery Mariana soon made. Every morning she went with Ita to the chapel of Sant' Anna; it had not crossed her mind at first that Annie was not a Catholic. She concluded she was not strong enough to walk there.

When the Angelus rang, Annie closed her eyes, and her mother fancied she was dozing. But soon she began to wonder that she never saw her make the sign of the Cross, or hold a rosary in her hands; and one day, when the Blessed Sacrament was carried by to a sick person, and she, and Ita, and even Edgar knelt as it passed, while Annie remained motionless, not even bowing her head, the truth began to burst on the poor mother; her grief was intense, but her faith and hope did not waver. It was impossible her child could be a

Protestant. She had no distinct notions on the subject of Protestantism. How should she? In some of their morning walks, Ita had tried in vain to explain to her how it came that Edgar went to Mass, and knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, and took off his hat as he passed before an image of the Madonna, and that Annie did none of these things.

"And yet Lucia says they are of the same religion!" she would exclaim, quite puzzled.

"Not of the same religion, exactly, but of the same Church," Ita replied. But this was far beyond poor Mariana's comprehension. Her unsophisticated mind could not master the distinction. But it was as well, perhaps, that she did not understand, and was all unpractised in controversy, and only full of faith, and love, and ardent devotion to our Blessed Lord. For without argument, without knowledge, save that of the gospels, and the lives of the saints, and what she had learned in long hours of patient suffering and earnest prayer, poor ignorant woman as she was, she won her daughter to the Church. Just as in her childhood, Annie had listened to the old man, who wished to make her a good Christian according to his light, and what he called a good Protestant; so now from her new-found mother's lips she imbibed the Catholic faith.

"O mother!" she wearily exclaimed one day, laying her tired head on her breast. "In England, a poor stupid creature does not know what to believe. There are half-a-dozen religions at least in one church. Some say there is no Blessed Sacrament at all in any church."

"God forgive them," Mariana ejaculated.

"Then some say they have the Blessed Sacrament in the Protestant churches."

"God help them, poor people!"

"And then some teach that people should say the

Hail Mary, and some that they ought not, and some that they should say half of it."

"Do not think of what they say, figlia mia. Do what the Holy Church of Christ tells you. She is built on the Rock and the gates of hell shall never prevail against her."

"Teach me," Annie said, looking into her mother's face as if she had been six years old.

And her mother did teach her, by her words, by her prayers, by her example, by the living daily power of that faith which came to Annie like a revelation to smooth her passage from time to eternity. For her life was not to be long. Strong and healthy as she had once seemed to be, the seeds of disease were in her frame, and she was gradually falling into a decline. A great change had taken place in her appearance. The delicate, transparent look which belongs to consumption, in its less painful forms, had quite transformed her face. The sunshine, the soft skies, the balmy air, Mariana's tenderness, and the superhuman joy she found in the Catholic Church, that spiritual mother she had been so long estranged from, revived, for a while, her strength, and raised her spirits. Those who had known Annie Derwent as the mistress of Holmwood would have wondered at her strange beauty if they could have seen her face on the day of her first communion, when on her return from St. Anne's Chapel she pressed her mother's arm against her heart, and said, "Now I know for sure God has been *here*."

An hour afterwards, whilst resting on the sofa, she asked her, "Mother, what did you do to obtain my conversion?"

"I offered up my life," Mariana answered with simplicity. "I begged of God, if it pleased him, to take it and give you the faith."

Annie said nothing, but clasped her hands together, and closed her eyes. Her mother saw she was praying by the motion of her lips. In a moment she said, "What you did for me I have done for Edgar, and my prayer, like yours, will be granted, and . . . . dear mother . . . . *my* offering will be accepted."

Poor Mariana! She kissed, without speaking, her child's pale face. It seemed, however, for a short time as if Annie had really rallied, and was recovering her health. In answer to Edgar's eager inquiries, the English doctor who had come from Nice to see her had held out hopes, that if she kept pretty well during the winter, she might go to England for the summer, and he and Ita made many plans on this subject.

Annie always listened to them cheerfully without saying much herself about it. It was at last decided that they should go to England in January, and after Ita's confinement, which was expected early in the spring, that they should return to Mentone either to travel back with Annie to Holmwood, or to spend some time with her at the Villa. She wished them to go; she thought it right on Ita's account. Perhaps, with her own strong impression that her life would not be long, she liked better to be left to the quiet holy care of her mother, than to witness the grief of one whom she had loved in a different manner.

During the last day before they went, she exerted herself to appear better than she felt. On the eve of his departure, she wished to see Edgar alone.

He sat down by her couch, near the window, overlooking the sea. "Annie . . ." he began, but his voice failed him.

She held out her hand, and said, "Dear Edgar, whatever happens, you must not be sorry for me. I am very happy now. All is as I wish. I went through a terrible time last autumn—those long weeks

after Mrs. Gerald's death . . . . Dear Mrs. Gerald . . . . she loved me very much . . . . that is, she loved Annie Derwent . . . ." A sad smile passed over the face on which Edgar was sorrowfully gazing. "But I want to tell you once more, that since I have known everything I have been quite happy. It would have been a great mistake not to tell me . . . . You have all done the best you could for me, and now I want nothing—nothing more than the mother God has given back to me, and what that poor mother has taught me. Edgar, dear Edgar, I know you cannot care for what a stupid person like me can say, but I want you to know how different everything has been in my soul since I have been a Catholic."

"Dearest Annie, I have never spoken to you about it, but I like to tell you, before I go, that I am glad, really glad, you have found consolation in the Roman Catholic communion. You had never been able to realize Catholic truths in ours, and I thank God that you have found peace in the Church in which you were baptized."

Annie looked at him wistfully, and then held out her hand to him. "God bless you, dearest Edgar," she said, "you know, I am sure, all that that 'God bless you' means. You know what will be my prayer in life, my hope in death."

"Do not talk of death, dear Annie; you are much, much better. We shall meet again in three months."

"It will be as God pleases," she answered. "But *if*—mind, I only say *if*—we should not see each other again, remember my last words."

They parted; and he had then a misgiving that he had been too sanguine as to her recovery. It was too late to change their plans; but, as he took leave of the Abate Giovanni and Ita's friend, the good Shia Teresina, who had become very intimate with him and

Mariana, he said, with tears in his eyes, "You will send for me if she should be worse?"

And how did Annie and Ita part? How did those two hearts, which had been so singularly united and so widely divided, feel in that hour, which one of them, at least, looked upon as a final parting? At first it seemed as if there would be no intimate communication between them even then, nor would there have been, in all probability, if Annie had not felt convinced she was dying. But as it was, from her who had once been the most reserved of the two, there came a burst of feeling which Ita would not have dared to pour forth. A mother's love, her new faith, or, it might be, the approach of death, seemed to have changed her nature. She spoke then—she spoke, at last, as she had never done before.

"Ita, listen to me," she said, throwing her arms round her neck, and drawing her close to herself. "We have been bound together in a very strange way. We have both loved Edgar with a more than common affection, but, thank God, we have never hated one another—have we?"

Ita could only weep on Annie's bosom.

"I was angry with you once. I said cruel words to you when you became a Catholic. Will you forgive me?"

"Oh, Annie! dearest Annie!"

"But I have often blessed you when you did not know it. I blessed you because you made him happy, because you were everything to him I could never have been. And now, oh! now, from the depths of my heart, I bless you more than I ever did before, because you have had the courage to let him suffer—because you have shown him bravely the way, and gone on before, where God is calling him—where he will one day follow you. Ita, we worked together for him those years at Holmwood . . . ."—here Annie

stopped to steady her voice—"to make him happy in this world; now we shall work together . . . . for a higher end, you by his side . . . . I here . . . . or where I shall soon be . . . . where we shall meet again."

"Oh, we shall—we shall meet here, or at Holmwood," Ita exclaimed, sobbing as if her heart would break. "And then, who knows? I may be the one . . . ."

Neither of them could speak again. With one long, tender kiss they took leave of each other.

When from the spot where Mentone is seen for the last time on the side of Nice, Edgar and Ita looked back on its peaceful loveliness, she threw herself sobbing into his arms. "Oh darling, darling Edgar!" she murmured, "have I, even I, who love you so much, loved you with such a beautiful, unselfish affection as poor Annie?"

He could not speak. What he felt was not exactly remorse. It had never seemed to him that there had been anything he could have helped in his conduct towards Annie, and yet Edgar Derwent's full and aching heart did not wholly acquit him. He possessed every blessing life can give, but that moment he almost envied the companion of his childhood, the true and devoted heart that had lived for him alone. He thought of the words of Scripture—"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

That last glimpse of Mentone from the height above Capo Martino! How many eyes have fixed themselves upon it with yearning tenderness! How many hearts have gone thence on their way, bearing with them an endless sorrow! How many a young life, full of sweetness and promise, has ended in that spot which looks so bright and smiling! Some passing away to another world, like angels not meant for earth; some sadly and slowly relinquishing their hold of fleeting pleasures; some in the fulness of faith, some in the darkness of

unbelief; some neglected and alone, some cherished to the last with passionate affection, and leaving behind them sweet memories enduring to the end!

O Thou Who hast made the beautiful world for man, and on some chosen lands hast poured forth healing treasures and the full riches of nature's wealth, painting the sea and sky with hues the hand of man cannot imitate, moulding each mountain and hill with matchless grace, and clothing them with living gems!

O God, give to these Thy works, to these scenes of more than common loveliness, a more than common power to raise the soul from the shadow to the reality, from the creature to the Creator! Let Thy olive groves speak of Gethsemane to the sufferer seeking their noon-day shade. To the sleepless ear let the unceasing roll of the sea murmur thoughts of eternity, and the Southern Alps, from their lofty summits, cry out, "Excelsior" to the wayfarer below.

A blessing on thy soft breezes—on thy groves, and on thy shore! On the hopes, the sorrows, and the joys that rise, linger, and live amidst thy sunny mounts, fair, bright, yet sad little city of the South!

* * * * * *

Holmwood, without Annie, seemed a strange place to Edgar Derwent; stranger still was it to take possession of that house as his own—that place where she had spent her whole childhood and youth, and which she might never see again! Neither he nor Ita felt any gladness as they drove up to the old house. The drawing-room looked so exactly as it used to do. It seemed as if Mrs. Gerald and Annie must be about to open the door and come in. The time of the year put them more in mind of the past than the summer had done. The lighted fires—the candles—the arm-chairs round the fire-place. It was all more like old days, than had been the weeks between their return from abroad and their last departure.

"Are there any letters?" Ita asked, as she went up to one of the tables.

"That telegram came this morning," the butler said. Edgar seized and tore it open. His face changed. But, afraid of startling his wife, he said nothing, and walked towards the fire-place with his back turned to her.

But she guessed what the news was, and followed him. He put the paper into her hands, and burst into tears. The message was as follows:—

"Lucia Adorno e morta oggi alle otto, pregando per loro. La povera sua madre ve ne manda la notizia. Requiescat in pace."

"Annie, Annie!" Edgar exclaimed. "She was an only sister to me. I would rather never have seen this place again than received this news!"

He felt this then, and he thought he should always feel it; but it is only the sorrows that change the whole aspect of our lives which leave ineffaceable traces. And even those, with a few exceptions, are healed by time. New hopes, new interests, new affections, in some cases, take the place of the old ones; whilst in others grief changes its nature and becomes something sacred and holy—a part of our religion, a part of ourselves. In future years Edgar Derwent will, indeed, never forget the young girl who after joyfully surrendering her wealth, her position, and the name she had so long borne, to one who, but for her, would never have been his wife, and to whom she had already yielded the place in his heart she had once hoped was her own, had died in the morning of her days, blessing him, and praying for him. He will sometimes sigh as he drives his wife and children in the pony-chaise, which was one of her last gifts to him when she was rich and he was poor, or walks by the Vicarage garden where she had planted so many flowers. That strong, patient, unrequited affection

will remain in his memory almost at times as a reproach; but life is life, and love is love, and Edgar is like other men. He has a wife whom he worships, a child he dotes upon. He has Holmwood, which he delights in, and is proud of. He has the means of making others happy, and friends will gather round him, and business will press upon him. And there will be less and less room in his mind for tender thoughts of Annie. Her mother, on the contrary, will mourn for her till her dying day. The memory of her child will be enshrined in her heart as in a sanctuary. Her life had been for many a year one long prayer. Till her daughter was found, that prayer had been a cry for help. Afterwards, it became a hymn of thanksgiving, and, even after her death, a song of praise. For she had been lost, and had been found. She had been snatched from the fold, and restored to it. Day by day, Mariana said, "Magnificat anima mea Dominum, et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo."

"Has Edgar Derwent become a Catholic?"

This was the question that Mr. Neville had put to his sister, in a letter which he wrote to her, some time after Annie's death, from the Noviciate of the Passionist Fathers, near Dublin, which he had lately entered.

Mrs. Sydney answered, "No, Edgar is not yet a Catholic. He is greatly changed since the days when he thought of parting with his wife on account of her conversion. He no longer avoids our society, and stays often with us. He has invited the Rolands and their children to spend several weeks at Holmwood. He has ceased blaming those who feel it their duty to leave the Church of England. He thinks the successive decisions of the Privy Council justify some hesitation in adhering to her Communion, and speaks gently of converts. He is a kind and active landlord, and assists with great charity the poor on his estates. What has given us great pleasure is his helping Ita to build a

little school at ——, for the Roman Catholic children. He sometimes does duty in the church at Bramblemoor for the clergyman, who has had bad health and is often absent, but not, I believe, at Holmwood. I often wish you could see their baby, the new Annie Derwent. She is such a pretty, attractive little child. Her birth would have been an unmitigated happiness to her parents if it had not brought forward in a painful manner the difference of religion still existing between them. Ita had almost hoped that being a girl he would have allowed her to be baptized a Catholic. But this was perhaps too much to expect at present, and though it grieved him, I think, to refuse her request, little Annie was christened at the parish church. Poor Ita felt it very much, but she hopes and prays on. One day, some time ago, he found her writing some lines, which he asked to see. They were a simple expression in verse of the strongest feelings of her soul. I have copied them out for you:—

'O Mother Church! my spirit's home,
Long sought and found at last!
Safe in the shelter of thy arms
I muse upon the past,
E'en in my childhood's days arose
A vision of thy form,
And through the thoughtlessness of youth
It showed amidst the storm.

'Like angel visits came those gleams
My startled soul before,
Wave upon wave advancing left
A token on the shore.
Not e'en an adversary's art
The lineaments could hide,
And though disfigured by a foe
Thy beauty I descried.

'For thy deep love my bosom yearned,
But trembled at thy creed,
And while it longed to pluck the flower
Refused to sow the seed.

"Oh that thy creed were sound," I cried,
Until I owned its power;
And almost prayed to find it false
In the last solemn hour.

'Great was the struggle, fierce the strife,
But wonderful the gain;
And not one trial, not one pang
Was sent or felt in vain.
For every link of the long chain
That led my soul to Thee,
Remains a monument of all
Thy love has done for me.'"

"You have never regretted having left us?" Edgar said, with a melancholy smile, as he finished reading these lines.

The eloquent look she gave him would have been answer enough, but she clasped her hands, and said: "If you could only but know what it is to be a Catholic!"

"A Roman Catholic?"

"Very well, so be it—a Roman Catholic. If you did but know what I now know by experience, there would be nothing left for me to wish on earth!"

"God would then be obliged to send us other trials," he said with another sad smile.

"Yes; I think He would," she firmly answered. "I have often thought that there have been few, very few, if any cases of conversion to the Roman Catholic Church in these past years which have not been followed by some great trial. The Cross has been visibly, I think, laid on those who have cast in their lot with her. Loss of fortune and position, failure in careers and professions, the unkindness of friends or sorrows straight from the hand of God, bereavements, bad health . . . . Yes, when I look upon our present position, so blessed with all the world can give, it has struck me that if the one great drawback to our happiness was removed, other sorrows would come . . . ." The thought of her husband's sight, always more or

less threatened, brought tears to her eyes. "But even if we knew for sure this was to be, if an angel were to reveal it to us, it would not stop us, Edgar would it; you from doing God's will if once you saw what it was, or I from praying for it, even though my own life should be the price?" Her eyes were raised to the skies with one of those ardent supplications which seem sometimes as if they would take heaven by storm. Edgar was much affected, but the time was not yet come for surrender.

On the anniversary of Annie's death, a Requiem Mass was sung in the chapel at Grantley Manor. To Ita's surprise, he said he meant to go there with her; for though he sometimes went and prayed before the Blessed Sacrament when he was staying in the house, he had never attended in England any Catholic service. When Mass was over that day, he remained nearly an hour alone in very earnest prayer.

When he came out of the chapel he found Ita waiting for him outside in the garden. He went up to her, drew her arm in his, and for a few minutes they walked up and down without speaking. At last he said: "That dear soul gave me my wife—my greatest earthly treasure. Then she gave us Holmwood, and now I am sure it is her prayers which have obtained for me this last, this highest gift—the gift of faith! I have held back so long; it seemed as if I could not believe, could not see the truth clearly enough. But just now, during the Mass—this Mass said for her—the words came into my mind, 'I will arise and go to my Father's house,' and every doubt seemed to vanish."

By the following Sunday Ita's husband was a Catholic. As they stood together that day on the steps of their ancestral home, she said to him: "I feel as if Annie had been our guardian angel on earth and in heaven."

THE END.

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